



SAN MARCO





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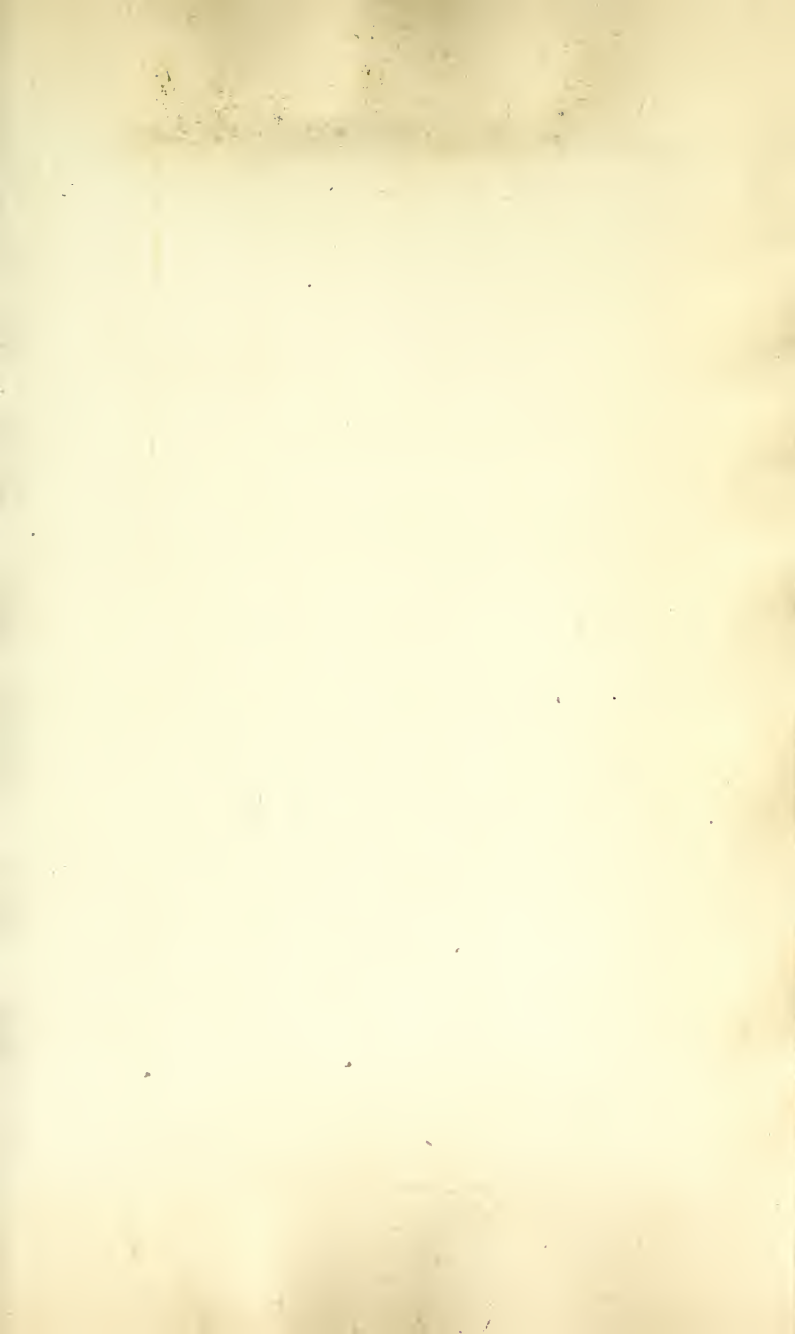
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" Florence "

- 1890 -



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THE MONASTERY OF SAN MARCO.



THE
MONASTERY OF SAN MARCO

BY

G. S. GODKIN

AUTHOR OF *THE LIFE OF VICTOR EMANUEL* &c.



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—
1887.







THE MONASTERY OF SAN MARCO.¹

Ever their phantoms rise before us,
Our loftier brothers, but one in blood;
At bed and at table they lord it o'er us,
With looks of beauty and words of good.

EMERSON.

The traveller in Italy, when wandering through the vacant halls and echoing cloisters of a suppressed convent, cannot help feeling deeply impressed with the idea of how much we owe to the monks of the Middle Ages. Notwithstanding the vicissitudes of fortune which have, in many cases, robbed them of their finest paintings and rarest books, enough still remain to show their former greatness. There are intact the beautiful frescoes which no rapacious invader could tear off the walls; there are the remains of splendid libraries which the brothers managed to preserve through every trial and danger. And as the stranger pictures to himself the long, weary days and years passed in copying those books in the fine, minute hand peculiar to the *frati*, and in executing the exquisite miniature paintings that adorn them, he must experience a sentiment of admiration for those patient labourers whose zeal and talent have left such rich legacies to posterity.

¹ This sketch of San Marco, which does not profess to be anything but a primer for those who have not time to study the subject, is for the most part a reprint of a series of papers which appeared years ago in a Magazine.

Of all religious Orders, the Dominicans were most devoted to study, and they did as much if not more to encourage art and literature in Tuscany than all the Medici. The story of the Monastery of San Marco presents, perhaps, the brightest page in their history, and, though not altogether unsullied by some dishonouring blots, it is a record of which the Order may well feel proud. They belonged to no ordinary type of common-place monks — the noble band who have written their names indelibly on those venerable walls, and inseparably interwoven the history of their country with the history of their convent.

The hopeless corruption of society and the lawless wickedness of those days drove them, like many, to assume the sacerdotal dress; but they did not fly to the desert to weep and pray for the sins of the world. They chose rather to stand in the midst of it, and do battle for the Right. If, in the heat of that fierce contest, they were sometimes borne down by the ruthless enemy, they rose to their feet again — their white garments a little soiled, perhaps, with the dust of the affray, but in the main still faithful to the cause of truth and justice. On the whole, theirs was a braver and manlier life than that of their brethren who dwelt in the desert, who were too apt to abandon themselves to a sort of spiritual egotism, thinking only of saving their own souls alive, and speaking of heaven as though it were their peculiar inheritance. The courage and fortitude of those who generously imperilled their own souls for the benefit of mankind commend themselves to our admiration.

1290. About the year 1290 a small body of monks belonging to the Order of St. Silvestre took possession of a poor little building in the Piazza San Marco, and in the space of nine years they had completed the erection of a respectable church adjoining their convent. The Silvestrini inhabited this dwelling for

above a century — living in the odour of sanctity, much beloved and respected by the surrounding population, to whose wants they ministered. Wealth and luxury, however, crept in, and as a natural consequence the brethren began to deteriorate rapidly. Finally, their misdemeanors became so public, that complaints were sent in to high quarters, and, after an investigation, they were dispossessed by order of the Archbishop, and their convent made over to another more worthy fraternity. The Silvestrini clung with a desperate tenacity to their worldly possessions, and entered a lawsuit against the new comers, with no other result, however, than branding still more darkly their own reputation.

The successors of this unworthy fraternity belonged to that Order which had been founded two centuries before by St. Domenico at Bologna, from whence the saint had sent twelve of his followers to evangelise the semi-pagan city of Florence.¹ Here the *Frați Predicatori* (preaching friars) took root, and increased in numbers and influence; but they always kept up their connection with Lombardy, being still under the control of the Vicar-General of that State. Cosmo de Medici, whose partiality for this learned Order showed itself in munificent gifts, made over the Monastery of San Marco to a small fraternity of Dominicans; and in 1430, the lawsuit ended, they, 1430. entered into possession of the premises. The Silvestrini had allowed the edifice to fall into such a state of dilapidation that it had to be pulled down and rebuilt, the monks meanwhile sleeping in sheds in the court. Means were not wanting to make the new establishment all that could be desired, and soon a splendid pile arose worthy of its illustrious founder.

¹ " St. Francis taught christian men how they were to behave, and St. Dominick taught christian men what they should think. "

The building alone cost Cosmo 36,000 gold florins. It was capable of accommodating 300 inmates, had spacious refectories, chapter-rooms, and a library of lofty proportions — 80 *braccia* long and 36 wide, supported by two rows of Doric columns. A large donation of books from Cosmo formed the nucleus of that splendid library which was the glory of San Marco for so many ages. It was soon increased by the valuable collection of a private citizen, Niccolo Niccoli, a biblio-maniac, who ruined himself by this passion. The brothers were proud of the fact that San Marco was the first library in Florence opened gratis to the public.

The church, built in the Italian-Gothic style, was restored and beautified at a cost of 36,000 gold florins. Relics of saints were imported from all parts in tabernacles of precious metals wrought with artistic designs, among which was a finger-bone of St. Mark; ribs, teeth, and even craniums of other distinguished individuals were not wanting. Gifts poured in from the wealthy in the shape of works of art, and among these was the beautiful gold cross of Giotto, coupled with the condition that the *frati* should keep a light perpetually burning before it. The church was reconsecrated in 1441 by Pope Eugene IV, and, under the patronage of this learned Pontiff and that of the Medici, the Monastery prospered exceedingly. The young community counted among its members scions of some of the noblest houses in Italy — the cloister being in those days a convenient way of disposing of younger sons, particularly quiet, studious ones, who had no taste for robbing and killing their neighbours.



CHAPTER I.

ST. ANTONINO.

In sober state
Through the sequester'd vale of cloister'd life
The venerable patriarch guileless held
The tenor of his way.

PORTEUS.

The fame which San Marco so rapidly acquired was owing chiefly to the presence of two illustrious inmates. Both were distinguished by extraordinary piety and a winning simplicity and modesty of character. It is true their mental gifts were unequal. The lofty genius of the one has interwoven his name inseparably with the history of Art; while the other, though an accomplished scholar for his day, can only be remembered for his great goodness. But there is a pre-eminence of virtue as well as talent; and those whose souls are cast in such a heavenly mould, who have sacrificed so much for their fellow-man as *St. Antonino*, are as rare as geniuses such as *Fra Angelico*. Therefore we venture to place their names side by side, claiming equal honour for both. We will speak of the Archbishop first, as he was the spiritual founder of the Monastery.

Antonino Pierozzi, the son of a Florentine notary, was born 1389. His childhood was most exemplary. At the age of fifteen he presented himself to the Superior of the Convent of Fiesole, near Florence, and begged to be received into the Order of *Frati Pre-*

1389.

dicatori. The sweet, ingenuous expression of the boy's face, and the gentle, diffident manner with which he preferred his request, won the heart of the Abbot. He was sent to Cortona for his probation, and there he had as companion in his studies a youth called Fra Giovanni, sometimes nicknamed by his fellow-students *Il Beato*, because of the deeply religious tone of his mind and the ardour with which he gave himself to the study of Christian art. Sympathy of taste soon gave birth to a warm friendship between those two kindred souls — and we may add a third, Fra Benedetto, brother of Fra' Angelico, a gifted miniature-painter, also distinguished for his rare penmanship. In company with these two brothers, commonly called "the Brothers of Mugello," Antonino returned to Fiesole; but, during a terrible schism in the Church, when two rival Popes made war on each other, the Fiesole community was driven into exile. Antonino spent some time in Rome and Naples, preaching and instituting reforms in monastic life. On his return to Cortona he was elected prior, and soon after passed in the same capacity to his first convent, which had been restored to the Dominicans. He was still comparatively young, though already famous, when he led the Fiesole monks to their new home in the Piazza San Marco, where Cosmo de Medici, then in the zenith of his power, determined to plant them.

Cosmo had been called back from a year's exile by the almost unanimous voice of the people. He had been received with the warmest demonstrations, and saluted "Father of his country." But he soon made the Florentines repent of their gushing confidence. He entered the city escorted by a large body of troops, and fortified himself in the city palace. He administered arbitrary laws, executed heads of illustrious houses, and drove others into exile, confiscating their property to enrich his creatures. The heads

of the houses being thus cut off, the miserable relations and dependents were reduced to beggary, and became desperate, many of them taking to a criminal mode of life, and some committing suicide. The daughters of those families, finding themselves deprived of their natural guardians, and without the necessary dowry which Italians of all ages are taught to expect with the bride, went to ruin.

Cosmo de Medici, the author of all this evil, lived on his ill-gotten property like a hereditary prince of the first water. He entertained with splendid hospitality, was a liberal patron of art and literature, erected handsome edifices, endowed monasteries, was a regular attendant at divine service — being one of those princes who think to atone for their crimes towards society by their devotion to the Church. Cosmo, however, seems to have had a genuine appreciation of learning and moral worth, as was proved by his sincere friendship for the prior of San Marco. Fra Angelico and his brother were also very dear to him; and so sympathetic did he find the society of those three gifted monks, that he had two small apartments in the convent fitted up for his reception when he wished to escape from the worry of State affairs and refresh his soul in society where art and learning were divorced from ambition. But why did those holy men accept his gifts and tolerate his society? is the natural question which occurs to the reader's mind. Why did they not shut their door in the face of this pious, accomplished highwayman, whose religion and conduct were so much at variance? The reasons are to be found — first, in the spirit of the age; and, secondly, in the character of the Abbot. In those times, freebooting in the northern countries, if conducted on a sufficiently large scale, was not considered unworthy of a Christian knight; and in the Italian republics seizing the reins of go-

vernment by some treacherous stroke and executing political enemies was regarded as the working of a legitimate ambition, and even sometimes wore the garb of patriotism — fidelity to *party* being all that was in honour expected of those chiefs. So that Cosmo was not, in truth, such a hypocrite as he would seem, if judged by our modern standard of right.

And then Antonino was not one of those warrior saints, like Hildebrand and Savonarola, who loved to strike their spiritual weapons on the armour of illustrious sinners. His life was not less stainless and self-sacrificing than theirs, and he was regarded with as much reverence as mortal man could inspire in his fellow-man. But it was not in his sweet, angelic nature to treat any sinner harshly, were he high or low. His boundless charity extended to all God's creatures; and often when he carried help and comfort to the homes of vice, he wept bitterly over the miseries which sin had entailed on the unhappy inmates. He spoke the truth to Cosmo de Medici with the freedom of a friend and the authority of a pastor, and Cosmo listened with respect — nay, reverence; but it does not seem that he made any atonement for the injustices he had committed. While he was revelling in luxury, feasting and corrupting the citizens with his lavish pomp, the families of those whom he had despoiled were reduced to the most abject straits. Antonino, whose office of confessor led him to the knowledge of everything, felt his tender heart wrung by the sufferings of the people. He did not feel that strong sense of injustice, that burning impatience of wrong, which was a consuming fire in Savonarola. He did not shut his convent-door in the face of the Medici; he tried to convince him of his error, and when he failed he meekly set about remedying the evil as best he could.

The prior of San Marco summoned to a conference twelve lay citizens whose worth he knew, and laid bare to them the harrowing pictures he had witnessed, urging upon them the Christian duty of aiding those unhappy beings. They willingly offered their services to carry out his plan, which was this: To organise a society to help the poor — particularly the *poveri vergognosi* (shame-faced poor), who had seen better days. They were called *providers*, and to each district two providers were appointed. These called in *aiders* to their assistance. All worked gratis. Money was collected from the faithful of all classes, and it was strictly forbidden by the Superior to put to interest or traffic the offerings of charity. This benevolent society prospered exceedingly, and the good, moral and physical, effected by its operations was incalculable. The providers came to be called by the grateful people, *Buoni uomini di San Martino*, by which name they have ever since been known. "Good men" they, indeed, proved themselves. Wherever the monks of San Marco went — where sorrow and sin and want and sickness abode — there also were their lay-helpers, the Good Men of St. Martin's, aiding and consoling the miserable. For destitute youths they provided employment, and to fatherless girls they gave a small dowry to enable them to marry or enter a convent.

Padre Antonino took under his fostering care, also, the Hospital of the Innocents — foundling-house — just then established. Besides all he did in Florence, he travelled much, reforming the convents of his Order, and establishing schools in connection with the religious houses of both sexes. But he was always rejoiced to return to his native city, where he was literally adored by the people as an angel of light, who hallowed the ground on which he trod. And so meekly did the simple-minded saint bear his popularity, that

even the proud, riotous, luxurious nobles — against whose life *his* was a silent, but strong protest — bore him no grudge. In the midst of his multifarious duties, Antonino never neglected study, to which he devoted the hours that others gave to repose, and he wrote several useful books on education.

1446. In the year 1446, the Archbishop of Florence died, and Pope Eugene, then sojourning in that city, appointed the Prior of San Marco to the vacant see, to the indescribable joy of the citizens, who rarely had the happiness of seeing a favourite pastor elevated to that honour on the ground of personal merit. The news reached Antonino at Siena, and struck him dumb with amaze and consternation. He had more than enough of duties already, and how was he to accept such a weighty charge? Dreading to meet the entreaties of his friends and the commands of the Pontiff, he betook himself to flight, hoping he would soon be forgotten and another man appointed instead. But his nephew and a party of friends, sent in pursuit by the Pope and the chief magistrate, caught him as he was embarking for the Island of Sardinia, and conducted him a State prisoner to the capital. With tears he protested to the citizens that he never would willingly assume the dignity offered him, and he wrote a piteous letter to the Pope begging to be let off. But Eugene was all the more convinced of his fitness, and laid his apostolic commands on him to accept office. Antonino meekly bowed to the decree, and retired to the convent of Fiesole to prepare for the great change in his life. On the appointed day, he was led, like a sheep to the slaughter, to be consecrated. The procession that marched from the city-gate to the cathedral was a splendid sight, notwithstanding that the new Archbishop presented the novel spectacle of walking barefooted — a proceeding which in another man might

have been open to the charge of affectation, but in Antonino, no one doubted, was pure humility. An immense concourse of clergy and religious orders went first; then came Antonino, supported on either side by a bishop, and preceded by a cardinal; the chief magistrate and the Magnificent Eight in state robes headed the civil procession, and were followed by the citizens of all ranks.

Antonino's establishment in the episcopal palace, where the late prelate had dwelt in regal splendour, was modest in the extreme. He banished every luxury and elegance, and retained but the few attendants absolutely necessary for the dignity of his office. The vast gardens attached to the palace were planted in vegetables for the poor, and his residence became an almshouse, where the needy were daily fed. He instituted many reforms among the clergy of his diocese; for, though unwilling to assume authority, he knew how to use it when in his hands. Soon after his elevation, he translated his work on Moral Philosophy, originally written in Latin, into the vulgar tongue. But his studies were broken in upon by the terrible pestilence of 1448-9. All the wealthy citizens not plague-stricken fled to their villas in the country, but the Archbishop remained true to his post, and, with his ever-faithful monks of San Marco and good men of San Martino, went about administering to the wants of the sick and dying. In the famine that followed three years after, Antonino was still the ruling spirit in every beneficent work. The magistrates entrusted to his care the distribution of the public money for the relief of the sufferers, and, when he had added his own and all his passionate appeals could win from the citizens, finding it still inadequate, he wrote to the Pope begging for more.

Antonino had such a reputation for wisdom that he was often summoned to councils, and so came to

be called *Antonino dei Consigli*. When he was in his seventieth year, the Pope called him to a conference, which had for its object the defence of Europe against the inroads of the Turks, then threatening the destruction of Christendom. The excitement of preaching the crusade brought on fever on his return to Florence, which slowly sapped his life. After he had taken the last Sacrament, he desired his servants to give all the money that was in the house to the poor that day. He then turned away his face, and remained in prayer till the last few minutes of his life.

1459. In the dawn of a May morning, 1459, this heaven-born spirit returned to its native element.

The Pope was moved to tears when he heard of the Archbishop's death, and ordered a magnificent funeral. Six bishops carried the coffin, followed by the mourning city. The pavement of the church was wet with the tears of the orphaned poor, as they knelt to kiss the coffin of their benefactor and spiritual father. He was interred in the church of his beloved convent of San Marco. We cannot say he rested in peace, as he has been many times disinterred by the superstitious Florentines, who thought the exposing the body of their saint on the altar would dissipate public calamities. If St. Antonino had the same objection to having his bones moved as our Shakespeare, it is a pity he did not leave some such injunction as that on the tomb of the poet. "Cursed be he who moves my bones!" might have stayed the sacrilegious hands from tearing him out of his grave every time there was a war, pestilence, or famine.

That day, however, is passed for ever, and St. Antonino's long sleep will never again be disturbed by the too-ardent faith of his fellow-citizens.

Some miracles are, of course, recorded in the biographies of the good Archbishop; but they are not so numerous nor important as those of other saints of





a more imaginative and less practical nature. Indeed, his virtues as a man are always more prominent than the saintly attributes by which he gained canonisation.

With such a founder, we cannot wonder that San Marco had soon a high reputation as an educational establishment, and many young nobles were committed to the care of the brothers. In the life of the Archbishop we come upon a touching little episode, which will serve to show the sort of training they got, and the spirit which then inspired the Dominicans. Antonio Neyrot was an orphan youth, to whom the Abbot had been as a father. He had assumed the novice's dress in preparation for the vows of the Order; but a sudden passion for travelling seized him. He desired to see the world first before finally settling down to a conventual life. He went to pay his respects to the Archbishop before starting, and he tried to dissuade him from his purpose, as the seas were then swarming with Moorish and Turkish pirates. But the young man was resolved, and departed with the blessing of his adopted father. What the Archbishop foreboded took place. He was taken by pirates, and sold in Tunis. His noble appearance and accomplishments induced the ruler of the land to offer him liberty and a distinguished office, if he abjured Christianity and became a Mahometan. After some months' suffering in chains, his faith gave way, and he was rewarded by rank and wealth and the hand of the daughter of a pasha. One day at the landing-place of the pier he met a newly-arrived Florentine, who related to him the saintly death of the Archbishop and his last words to his flock. Antonio Neyrot was so struck with remorse by the memories thus recalled, that he resolved to make what atonement he could for his apostacy. He went home and despoiled himself of his rich robes, bade farewell to his lady, and, dressed in the white tunic of a Do-

minican, went forth to meet the Sovereign and his train entering the city, where he publicly declared himself a Christian. The Bey ordered him to be imprisoned for a week to think over it; but, finding him obstinate at the end of that time, he was stoned to death in the market-place, kneeling, like Stephen, with eyes turned heavenward, and praying for pardon for his apostacy.

CHAPTER II.

FRA ANGELICO.

His spirit was the home
Of aspirations high,
A temple whose tall dome
Was hidden in the sky.

It was probably in the year 1284 or '85 that the great painter Cimabue took that famous ride in which he found the bare-footed little shepherd sketching his sheep upon a stone, and forthwith asked his father to hand him over to him for instruction.

"Full many a flower is born to blush unseen;" and it is likely that among all the rich gentlemen that rode bye only Cimabue had the eye to discern in that rude sketch the germ of genius, which but for his fostering care might have withered in the bud. And it is to Cimabue, in the first instance, the world owes all that his matchless pupil did for Art. Giotto was the founder of Italian Art, as his friend Dante was the founder of the Italian language; and he divided with him the honours of the century to which he belonged. His transcendent powers silenced all detracting voices.¹

¹ "Whatever other men dreamed of, he did. He could work in mosaic, he could work in marble, he could paint and he could build; and all thoroughly; a man of supreme faculty, supreme common sense." — RUSKIN.

"Giotto filled Italy with work that taught succeeding centuries of painters. What Giotto gave to Art was before all things vitality. His Madonnas are no longer symbols of a certain phase of divine awe, but pictures of maternal love. He *humanized* the mysteries of faith." — ADDINGTON SYMONDS.

But at the period of which we now write, Giotto had been long laid in his grave; and the Renaissance was in the full glow of its vigorous prime. There was an ever-growing rage for the revival of classic Art and Literature. The nearer the artist could approach the Greek ideal, the more he was glorified and courted. And every Italian, says a famous writer, from the Pope on his throne to the clerk in a Florentine counting house, was a judge of Art.

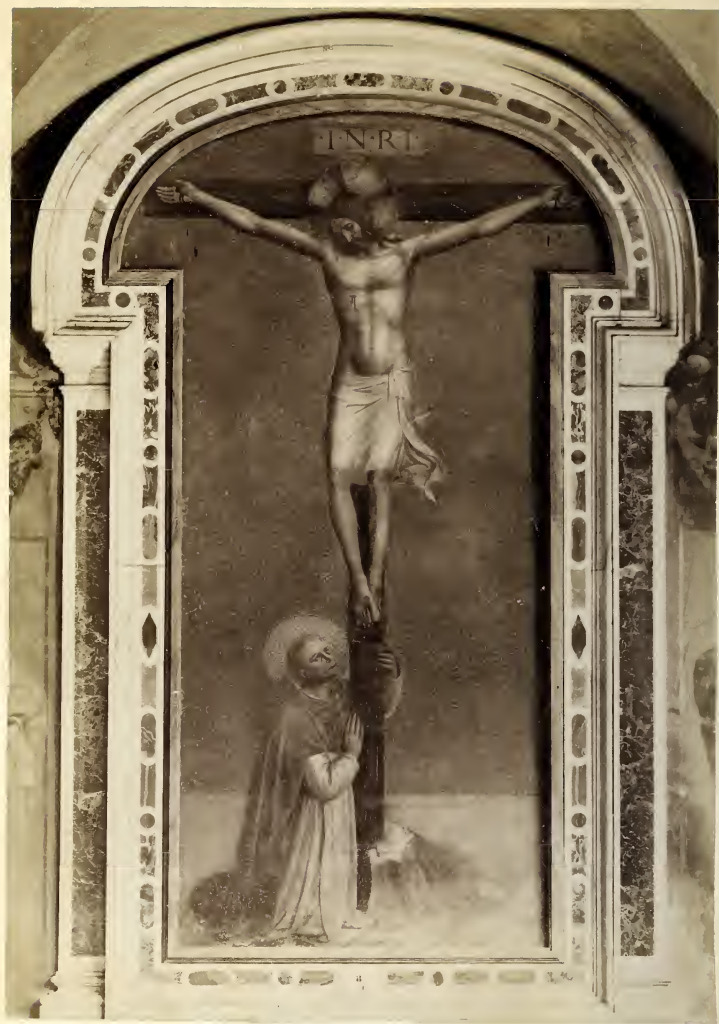
Angelico
born 1387.

Forty years after the death of Giotto there was born in the valley of the Mugello, only a few miles from Florence, and not far from the birth-place of Giotto, the subject of our present sketch. The child was called Guido. His father was probably a well-to-do peasant farmer, who yielded to his son's desire to study Art. We are told that when quite a little boy he could earn his livelihood by illuminating choral books for the churches. Of his family we know nothing except that he had a younger brother, who must have been a small replica of this immortal Angelico. He, too, had a gift for painting, and at an early age determined to devote himself and his talent to religion. On the same day the brothers of Mugello donned the Dominican habit, and entered the same convent of Fiesole. Guido was not twenty-one when he took this important step. He was called in religion Fra Giovanni, but the reverence his works and his life inspired won from his countrymen the surnames of *Angelico* and *Il Beato*. He and his brother followed the fortunes of the fraternity when they were transplanted from Fiesole to San Marco, under the leadership of St. Antonino. In San Marco the most of his long and peaceful life was spent, and in San Marco he left the most valuable and characteristic of his works.

At this time the Giotto school had been flourishing for a century; but, from a too-rigid adherence to pri-







mitive rules and precepts, it had not made that progress which its early years had promised. A close copy of Nature, with undeviating fidelity in every detail, was the great canon to which the painters of this period adhered so strictly, that little play was left for the imagination. The cold, classic realism into which the Giotto style had gradually stiffened was contrary to the artistic instincts of Fra Angelico, and he felt it would be impious to violate those instincts. When first executing the commissions of Cosmo de Medici, he tried to please the classic taste of his patron in all things; but his heart rebelled against the uncongenial work. He broke through the hitherto unalterable canons of art, and abandoned himself to the sway of his original genius. Instead of literal portraits of commonplace mortals, he peopled the canvas with seraphic forms wrought out of the golden hues of his rich imagination. He sought his inspiration from Heaven, and from Heaven he felt it came. When pacing the quiet cloisters, his liquid eyes, in which the fire of genius was softened by the mild light of religion, fixed on the star-lit sky, he would thrill and turn pale with a sudden conception, and, before that conception was brought to maturity, he spent sleepless nights praying, and sometimes weeping, at the foot of the Cross. He painted the crucified Lord on his knees, his soul wrapt in heavenly visions while he worked. He never retouched his pictures; as they came from his hand while the inspiration was upon him, so they remained. It is needless to say that Fra Angelico never worked for pay, and never executed a picture that was not intended to touch the heart and inspire high and holy sentiments in the mind of the beholder. And in this he succeeded as no one had ever succeeded before. Other painters of the Giottesque school may have surpassed him in design, in colour, and in form. Making

the voluptuous types of Greek and Roman art their models, they aimed at external perfection; but to Fra Angelico was given to paint the *soul*. "No one need ever hope to equal him in his representation of the Divinity," says a modern critic.¹ His Madonnas have such a soft, pensive grace, such a look of tender, devout contemplation, that the imagination is touched while the sense of beauty is satisfied. The chaste simplicity of Mary's long, straight robe, the graceful folds in which the mantle falls so naturally, are expressive in themselves, and are in perfect keeping with the timid bearing and seraphic countenance, forming a harmonious whole which the eye rests on with pleasure, and quits with reluctance.²

Fra Angelico, like most great painters, was a very hard worker. He left innumerable memorials of himself in all the convents he inhabited — Perugia, Cortona, Fiesole, and San Marco. He assisted in adorning the Cathedral of Orvieto and the Church of Santa

¹ Padre Marchese, author of several works on Art.

² "His most beautiful faces seem copied from angels seen in vision, not from sons of men." — ADDINGTON SYMONDS.

"Although beautiful and ideal, his Christ, even in celestial triumph, is pale, pensive and slightly emaciated. He is the eternal friend, the somewhat melancholy consoler of the *Imitations*; the poetic merciful Lord, as the subdued heart images him. He is not the over-healthy figure of the Renaissance painters. His long curling hair and blond beard sweetly frame his features. Sometimes he smiles faintly, while his gravity is never dissassociated with affectionate benignity.

"The Virgin, kneeling with down cast eyes, seems a young maiden at her first Communion. Occasionally her head is too large, as is common with the inspired; her shoulders are narrow and her hands small. The spiritual inward life has reduced the other life. The long blue mantle wrought in gold in which she is always enveloped, scarcely allows it to be supposed that she has a body. No one can imagine, before having seen it, such immaculate modesty and virginal candor. By her side Raphael's virgins are merely simple vigorous peasants." — TAINE.

"The frescoes I care most for in Florence were the few that a *donna* was allowed to see in the convent of San Marco by Fra Angelico." — GEORGE ELIOT.



Maria Novella in Florence. He painted the walls of a chapel at Rome for Pope Nicholas V. At the Louvre in Paris there is an altar-piece by him — the Coronation of the Virgin; and in Berlin there is a picture of his, representing St. Francis and St. Dominick embracing. From another hand than his, this might have been thought à satire, as the followers of those two illustrious saints hated each other to the death.

The calm, uneventful life of the great mystic is comprised in the description of his works, for he lived in his art. He was modest, kind-hearted, simple, strict in his religious observances. When he was painting in the Vatican, the Pope invited him to breakfast on a fast-day, on which occasion he declined to eat meat, in spite of the Pope's permission. He died in Rome 1455, in the sixty-eighth year of his age. Vasari says :

" Fra Giovanni was a man of simple life and most holy manners; he shunned all worldliness, and lived purely. He was a friend to the poor, as truly I believe his soul to be in heaven this day. He was never known to be in anger with the other *frati* — which wonderful thing seems almost impossible to believe." From this we conclude that the distinguished author of the " Lives of the Painters " had found the brethren very aggravating people.

Angelico had lived to see the decay of the religious school of Giotto, of which he was the last ornament; but he had seen rise from it, Phoenix-like, a new one, full of life and nature and grace, and he rejoiced in it; for whatever tended to the glory of art could not fail to make him happy. He had brought new lustre to Christian art, and pointed moral and religious lessons to his own and future generations. He had played his part, and was content to slip away quietly and make room for rising stars.

CHAPTER III.

SAVONAROLA.

His nature is too noble for the world :
He would not flatter Neptune for his trident,
Or Jove for 's power to thunder. His heart's his mouth ;
What his breast forges, that his tongue must vent.

A rarer spirit never
Did steer humanity.

SHAKESPEARE.

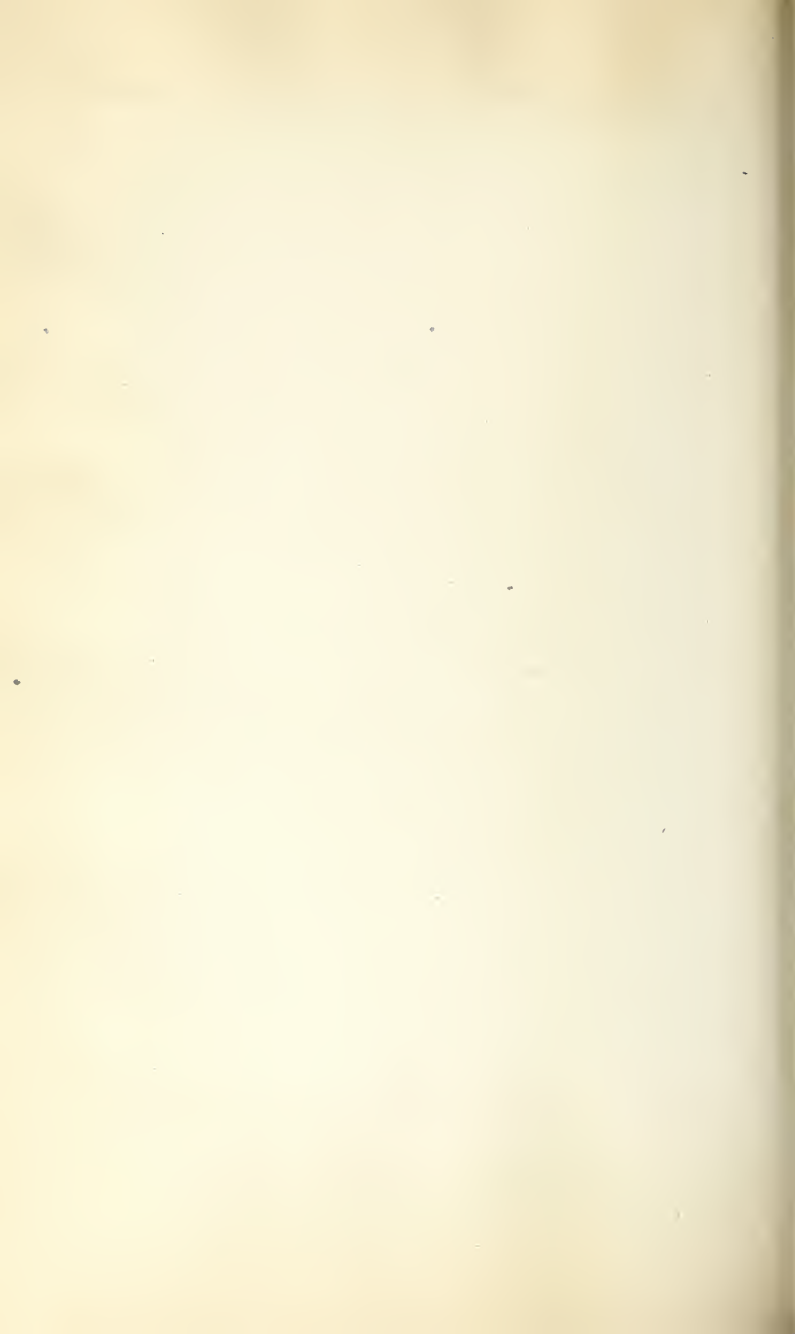
I.

We turn another page in the annals of San Marco, and a fresh portrait meets our view. It is a very different face from that of the withered, toothless saint, with a black skull-cap, and an expression of imperturbable serenity on his benevolent old face. Neither does it resemble the mystic painter, with the hood thrown back from his smooth brow, and his dreamy dark eyes wrapt in heavenly contemplation. It is the profile of a man in the prime of life, with a black hood drawn close round a face not by any means handsome, but full of concentrated force, moral and intellectual. His rugged brow projects over eyes which have been variously described as grey and blue, but which in the portrait seem dark hazel — eager, passionate, piercing eyes, in which his soul might be read by any one bold enough to bear their fiery, penetrating glance. They are eyes more accustomed to interrogate than be interrogated, for



HIERONYMI FERRARIENSIS ADEO
MISSI PROPHETE EFFIGIES





they belong to a man to whom the human heart was an open book. The high arch of the nose indicates the power and the will to command, while the firmly-shut mouth has a self-contained, resolute expression. The lower jaw projects overmuch, and gives a somewhat pugnacious and plebeian look to the countenance. That striking, unsymmetrical, passion-worn face rivets the attention of the beholder; and while he gazes at it, he begins to comprehend the mysterious, latent power by which the owner swayed the minds of men. The hands do not appear in the portrait — those wonderfully expressive, *transparent* hands, so delicate that they did not seem to belong to the dark, rugged face; but we can imagine them folded on the breast of his white tunic, clasping the red cross.

The plain exterior of this Dominican monk enshrined a heart and brain of that rare quality which the world seldom sees twice in the same century. In fact, he was one of Nature's kings; a regal diadem would have suited him better than the cowl, and he would have borne the sceptre more effectively than the cross. He loved power, but it was no vulgar ambition which urged him in pursuit of it. The lofty aim to which his soul aspired was the reformation of the Church, and, through it, the purification of the Christian world. No one was willing or able to perform this herculean task but him. Like Hamlet, he felt the world was out of joint, and he was born to set it right. The brutal, besotted world would not be set right, and so, after a long, fierce struggle, the world was triumphant, and the trumpet-voice of the reformer silenced in death.

San Marco is alive with memories of this great, unhappy man, who makes his individuality felt above his fellows, even after the lapse of four centuries. His all-powerful enemies, who tried every art, could never succeed in stamping him out of existence. His

memory has survived every persecution, every calumny; and the late repentant Florentines have built within the walls of San Marco a tomb to the prophet whom their fathers stoned. Here is a brief epitome of his thrilling story:—

Savonarola
born 1452.

Eight years before the death of the Archbishop St. Antonino, there was born in Ferrara, 21st September, 1452, Girolamo, third son of Dr. Niccolo Savonarola—a man of ancient and respectable family, but in reduced circumstances. The early education of his boys was watched over by their grandfather, and he soon perceived in the little Girolamo indications of a mind and character above the common. He entered the college of Ferrara when still a child, where he distinguished himself in classic studies, to which he applied himself so closely that his health began to suffer. As a boy, he was employed to assist the professors, and was considered a very efficient teacher. Ferrara had a gay, brilliant Court, and the young Savonarola, who was well-connected, might, if he chose, have partaken of its festivities. But he disliked fashionable society so much, that he never but once presented himself there. He lived in great retirement, devoting his leisure hours to the composition of poetry and playing on the lute. However, at the age of eighteen he found time to fall in love with a young lady who lived opposite to him. It is difficult to imagine the austere prophet enacting the part of a young lover. But this is the only weakness of his for the fair sex on record, and it was of brief duration. The lady was the illegitimate daughter of the great Florentine house of Strozzi; but Savonarola did not mean to let that stand in the way of their union, and one day he asked her permission to address himself to her parents. The young coquette replied haughtily that it was not meet for a daughter of the noble house of Strozzi to mate with

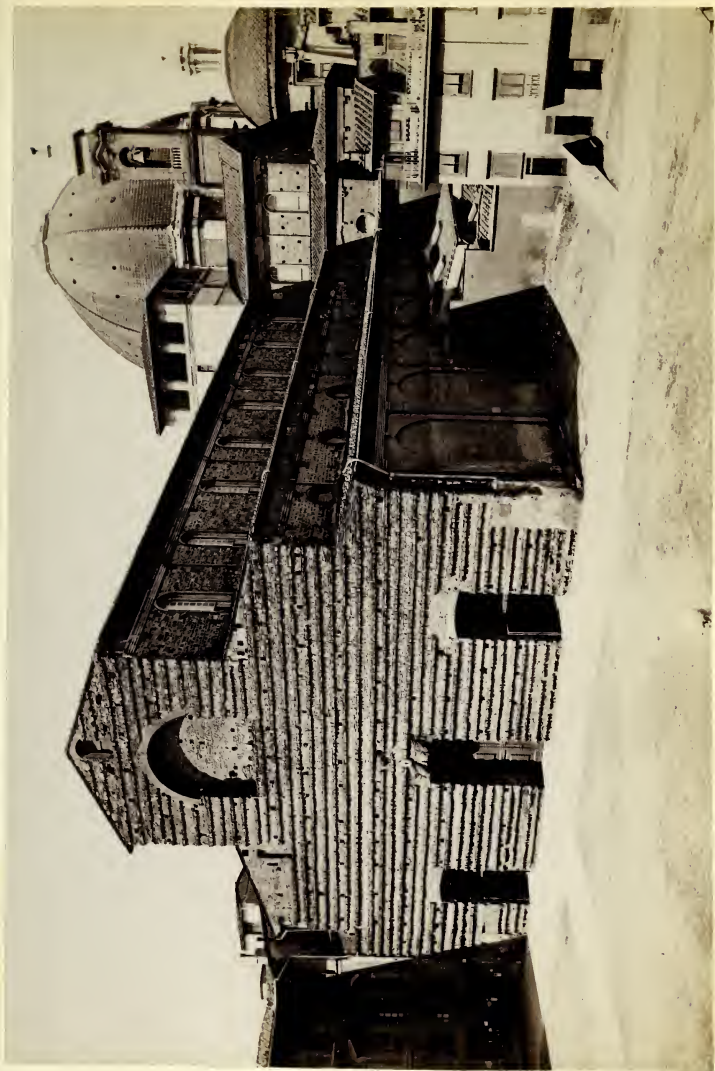
a Savonarola. Girolamo replied passionately, reminding her of her irregular birth.

Though a mere boy, Savonarola had a bitter awakening from his "love's young dream." It seemed to have made a deep and lasting impression on him. His poetical effusions, written during the following year, take a most melancholy and hopeless view of life. For the next two years he worked very hard, and became daily more oppressed by the corruptions and wickedness of the world. He shunned the society of his fellow-students, and took long solitary walks after dark outside the city gates. In one of those rambles he reached the neighbouring town of Faenza, where he entered a church by chance, and heard a sermon from a friar which decided him on the turning-point of his existence. Many years after, he spoke of the extraordinary effect of that sermon, and said: "I have it all in my heart, even now." He returned home full of serious thoughts, which continued to disturb him all night, and the morrow found him firmly resolved to assume the sacerdotal dress. Still, he allowed nearly another year to elapse before taking the irrevocable step. It was a period of intense excitement, which deprived him of rest and appetite. The mental struggle he was undergoing was not caused by any weak regrets for the world, in the common acceptance of the phrase. The doubts which assailed him were suggested by the fear that he was forsaking the duty he owed to fondly-attached parents and a rather helpless young family. But he felt the call of his vocation imperative.

His final resolution was conveyed to his father in a letter written from a monastery in Bologna, whither he had fled secretly the day before. In this long and affectionate epistle, he states at length the motives which had decided him to take the step; — the great misery in the world and iniquity of men;

the robberies, adulteries, pride, idolatry, cruelty. It seemed to him that the age had become so wicked that no one did good; all virtue was extinct. After defending himself at some length, and dwelling on the desire he had to fly from "bestiality" and lead a useful, rational, intellectual life, he adds: "Therefore, dearest father, instead of weeping, you ought to thank the Lord that He has given you a son esteemed worthy to be enrolled as a soldier of Messer Jesus Christ." Then he breaks into the tenderest expressions of affection, bids him comfort his mother, and commends to his special care his little brother Albert, of whom he was very fond.

Fra Girolamo, after a year's probationary study, took the irrevocable vows of a Dominican monk in the twenty-fourth year of his age. His education was so advanced that his superiors dispensed with the ordinary course of study allotted to the young monks, and appointed him to the duty of teaching philosophy. He had been considered a brilliant scholar at college, but he was sick of the disputes of the rival schools; and pagan philosophy was one of the "vain things" that he wished to leave behind him on entering the cloister; so he very unwillingly assumed the duty of expounding it. Nevertheless, he found time to write a book called "*Compendio di Filosofia*." It does not appear from any written or spoken word that Fra Girolamo ever looked back with regret to the world he had left. As he regarded it at the age of twenty he continued to regard it to the end of his life — an impure, corrupt world, in which it was hardly possible for a man to live honestly unless he foreswore wealth and rank and pleasure. It did not cost him much to abandon it; to a man of his refined nature and high mental culture, material enjoyments are as nothing compared with the requirements of his moral and intellectual life.





After a few years spent in teaching and studying, Fra Girolamo was appointed to go on a preaching mission. In 1483 he found himself in the convent of San Marco, Florence, and was engaged to preach the Lent sermons in the church of San Lorenzo. He had scarcely begun his discourse, when he observed a general movement towards the doors, and in a few minutes the faithful were issuing out of the edifice in hot haste, so much were the sweet-tongued Florentines disgusted by his plain, blunt manner and Lombard accent. It is not recorded that the young preacher consoled himself, like a certain great statesman of our day, by saying: "The time will come when you will listen to me!" No prophetic instinct told him of his future fame. But the time did come when the vast cathedral could not hold the eager audience which hung with reverence on every word that fell from his lips. The disappointed preacher retired to his cell, and gave himself up with more earnest devotion to the study of the Scriptures, to prayer, and to fasting; for he attributed the failure to his own unworthiness. The depression of spirits under which he laboured was increased by the disturbed state of the Church, and he gave vent to his feelings in a flood of sweet, mournful verse. 1483.

The following year Savonarola began to preach in his own country, where his provincial accent was no hindrance. It was in the year 1487, in Brescia, that he first felt himself impelled to use the language of prophecy in denouncing imminent calamities on Italy, if she did not repent and reform. About this time he was sent as an envoy to a chapter of the Congregation of Lombardy, where the fathers were met to consider the corruption and decay of the religious Orders. Savonarola, who is spoken of as a very learned and devout man, advocated sweeping reforms. And, indeed, if we may judge by a letter of his to a 1487.

friend, the Countess Mirandola, the worthy fathers had not taken up the matter too soon. He gives such a picture of monastic life as induces the belief that he had not much improved his society when changing the secular for the religious dress. But the monastic institution was not of his making, and all he could do was to try and correct the abuses which were becoming more unblushing every year. He threw his whole soul into the reform, and for a man in a subordinate position accomplished much.

In addition to his great intellect and ardent faith, Savonarola was gifted with that strong personality which all religious leaders have possessed. In a letter to his mother dated Genoa, he thus describes his growing influence:

"I study as well as I can to serve Him, and not allow any earthly or carnal affection to draw me from my work, because if He has given me the talent, I must spend it so as to please Him. Then, my beloved mother, you ought not to grieve that I leave you, and travel in divers cities, because all this I do for the health of many souls — preaching, exhorting, confessing, reading, and counselling. And when I wish to depart, they weep, both men and women, and highly prize my words."

In this same year, Fra Girolamo paid a last visit to his family at Ferrara before setting out for Florence, where an irresistible fate was destined to draw him into the vortex of European politics. Had he any of the ambitious projects in his head that were afterwards attributed to him, as he trudged along on foot with a staff and wallet from Bologna to the Tuscan capital? What had a poor preaching friar and bookworm to do with the complicated intrigues, and villanous outrages that went under the name of State affairs in Italy? Could he not do his duty quietly in that sphere of life in which Providence had placed

him, and forget Alexander VI and Charles VIII, and Ludovico of Milan? That is to say, could he not shut his eyes to corruption, injustice, cruelty, and every species of crime, without protesting against them? He could not.

There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will;

and his destiny was carved out for him when Nature made him what he was. He was not a man that could say his masses and count his beads calmly while his country was sinking deeper and deeper in the abyss of crime, when he felt that he had in him the requisite qualities to raise her up, and combat the evil tendencies of the age. In this journey, his projects — if he then had any defined projects — were well-nigh cut short. Travelling in the guise of a pilgrim some hundred miles under an Italian sun proved too much for his delicate frame. The pale, hollow-eyed friar sank exhausted with a consuming fever upon him on the threshold of a wayside cottage. A good Samaritan cared for him like a brother, little dreaming when he showed this charity to the poor traveller what a rare man his guest was. It sometimes *does* happen that the hospitable entertain angels unawares.

Once more in Florence, he was seized with the same mystic presentiments of coming evil which had formerly disturbed his mind on various occasions, and with which he had struggled as sickly fancies. But this time no amount of mental occupation could dissipate the visions. He felt an inner warning that the Church and the country should be purged by great calamities, and it was his duty to announce it to the world that they might prepare for it. *Florence being in the centre of Italy as the heart is in the centre of the body*, that city seemed to be the one in which the

truth should be preached, so that it might be disseminated throughout the land. But Fra Girolamo was not employed as a preacher in the Tuscan capital. The fathers instead, probably remembering his early failure, appointed him professor of moral philosophy and theology.

But, even in the retirement of a monastic school, such an intellect, now in the full maturity of its powers, could not long remain hidden. The great original mind of Savonarola gave a new and wide character to the lessons on philosophy. The students crowded to the lecture-room with such unwonted eagerness that the fathers' attention being excited, they also began to assemble and await with interest the appearance of Fra Girolamo. By degrees the fame of the lecturer began to spread beyond the convent walls, and externs sought admittance, so that the hall was too small for the audience, which had to be transferred to the orchard. Savonarola had a powerful, thrilling voice, but the sudden changes of weather common in Florence, hurt his chest while speaking in the open air. Finally, the prior, not without some compunction, agreed to yield the church for lectures on profane subjects. It was crowded to overflowing on the first day. The influence of the sacred edifice had such an effect on the lecturer's mind, that unconsciously his discourse glided into a sermon. He saw before him a vast lay audience of Florentines, the most intellectual and thoughtful members of the community, whose conversion would be well worth achieving, even if the work were to stop with them. But doubtless the preacher was excited by the idea that they would become the propagators and instruments of his reform. So he preached a startling, thrilling sermon, which had for its theme the awful presentiments with which his mind had been lately filled. He warned his hearers to prepare



for terrible calamities; the divine wrath would be speedily poured out upon them for their wickedness. The Church should be reformed and purified. To Florence he specially addressed himself. "*Firenze sarà flagellata*," he said, with the terrible solemnity of conviction. The audience stood mute and spell-bound; the preacher's eyes flashed, his slight frame trembled and dilated as he denounced the sins of the Republic in a torrent of passionate language — the sudden outpouring of the pent-up indignation of years; and he seemed to them an inspired prophet.

Fra Girolamo had achieved an immense success, and he was not slow in following it up. His fame as a preacher spread like the wind, and San Marco became the most frequented church in Florence. Lorenzo il Magnifico, the grandson of that Cosmo of St. Antonino's time, now reigned over the so-called Republic of Florence. He became alarmed at the reflections suggested by the terrible preacher, and he forthwith employed a clever Augustinian to reply to him. But the hireling could make no stand against the man who spoke from the depth of his convictions, and the Dominican's popularity increased daily. It would appear that Savonarola had doubts as to whether he was justified in giving free expression to his previsions. He did not again touch upon them for some time, and resolved to take another theme for his Lent sermons in the Duomo, but the subject forced itself on his mind to the exclusion of all others. "God is my witness," he says in his confession, "that all Saturday, and the night also, I remained in thought and prayer, and never could turn my mind to any other theme; and on Sunday morning, feeling much exhausted because of the long vigil, I said: - Fool, do you not see that it is the will of God that you should preach on this subject? - And that day I made an awakening discourse."

After this startling sermon in the Duomo, in which Savonarola unmistakably declared himself the enemy of corruption and tyranny and the champion of a pure and liberal form of government, the Medici became seriously alarmed, and some of the hangers-on of the ruling family suggested the easy, and then common method of making away with the troublesome Frate by assassination. Such a course was repugnant to the feelings of the Magnificent, who, like all his family, had a great respect for Mind. He would rather disarm hostility by the subtlety of his wit than by force or treachery. Meantime the monks of San Marco, over whom Savonarola had obtained a wonderful ascendancy in spite of the severity of the customs which he practised and preached, hastened to elect him to the priory of the Monastery, in order to prevent the possibility of his being sent away on any pretext. It had always been the custom for a newly-elected abbot to pay a visit of thanks to the head of the Republic, whose family had been such liberal patrons of San Marco. Savonarola resolved to maintain his independence, and would not go to do homage for the promotion which he felt he did not owe to the chief magistrate.

Lorenzo, who was anxious to make the personal acquaintance of the remarkable preacher, awaited the visit with impatience; and on finding that the haughty Frate stood on his dignity, *he* went to the church of San Marco, contrary to his custom, the following Sunday, and after service took a walk in the garden, attended by some of the monks. One of the brothers sought the prior, who had retired to his study when he left church, and begged him to give some sort of welcome to the prince, who had condescended to visit them. "Has he asked for me?" he inquired. The monk replied in the negative. "Then leave him in liberty," said Savonarola, turning to his book. Lo-

renzo soon after sent large donations to the Monastery; but when the box was opened the prior ordered the money to be sent to the *Buoni uomini di San Martino*. Lorenzo's diplomacy was not proof against repeated slights; he was roused to say some bitter things of his irreconcilable foe, and so the war went on till Savonarola one day gave expression to these extraordinary words: "I am a foreigner, and he is a citizen, and the first of the city. Nevertheless, I shall remain, and he must depart." The fact that soon after the Medici grew fatally ill, gave to Savonarola's words the prestige of a prophecy.

When Lorenzo felt his end approaching, his conscience being tormented by painful memories which his courtly confessors could not dissipate, he was seized with a desire to see the remarkable priest, whom gold could not buy nor Court favour soften; and he sent a friend with a courteous message asking the favour of a private interview. The prior came at once to the villa, and was left alone with the dying prince, who opened his mind to him freely. The Frate prescribed three medicines to the diseased soul. Firstly, to believe fervently on the mercy of Christ; secondly, to make atonement to all those whom he had wronged; thirdly, to restore to Florence the liberty of which his family had despoiled her. The first two injunctions Lorenzo willingly agreed to obey, but at the last he was silent. Savonarola was not there in the character of a confessor, and did not urge his advice. When he was taking leave, it is said Lorenzo begged his benediction, which the stern priest refused. It is right to add that this last fact is not well authenticated. It is certain Savonarola never betrayed the confidence of a dying man, and it is very improbable that the Medici would have related the particulars of the interview to any one.

1493. Soon after this (1493) Savonarola went on a preaching mission to Bologna, which was then under the sway of the great family of Bentivoglio — a curious name, signifying *I love thee well*. The wife of the reigning potentate was a proud lady, who came to church attended by a numerous retinue of satellites; besides which she had "the vice of coming in late" and disturbing the congregation. Savonarola made a request from the pulpit that every one should be placed before the sermon began. The lady Bentivoglio took no notice of the hint. Then he called on her, and politely represented the inconvenience of the proceeding. There was an authority in Savonarola's mildest speech which seldom failed to bow the will of others to his own, and the lady graciously and respectfully promised to attend to his wishes. But the wicked young courtiers laughed her out of her good intention, and she went to the next sermon with a great following of ladies, gentlemen, servants, guards, etc. — all late. The Frate, who was a man of fiery temperament, though habitually kept under control, lost his self-possession and exclaimed angrily: "Here is the demon coming to disturb the Word of God!"

An unseemly uproar took place. The lady fainted, and two of her brothers rushed to the pulpit, menacing the preacher with violence; but he was protected by the congregation, some of whom carried the riotous nobles out of the church. The Countess Bentivoglio could not pardon so great an insult; she hired assassins to murder the offending priest, and they were actually introduced into his private apartments; but in the presence of the minister of God the ruffians' courage failed. In consequence of this misadventure, Savonarola's friends hurried him away from Bologna, the Lent sermons being then almost at a close.

II.

The more we read of the evidence of those who knew the great Frate intimately, and of his own writings and private correspondence, the more we feel disposed to acquit him of any preconceived designs of meddling in politics. His mind was from boyhood dominated by an intense, passionate religious feeling, which rendered his life, in the midst of an impious generation, insupportable, and forced him to tear himself loose from his much-loved family to bury himself in a convent. This religious zeal never decreased during his monastic life — if anything, it became intensified. The reforms of which he dreamed were to be effected by the purifying influence of the Gospel, in which he had profound faith — not by political revolutions. There was a poetic mysticism pervading Savonarola's religious sentiments which seem antagonistic to the spirit of a political agitator. In reading his tracts, one feels that the writer speaks from the experience of his own feelings. In his *Treatise on the Love of Jesus Christ*, he thus expresses himself: "The love of Christ is that lively affection by which the believer desires that his soul become almost part of that of Christ, and that the life of the Lord should reproduce itself in him, not by external imitation, but by internal and divine inspiration. He would desire that the religion of Christ would be in him so real that he would suffer His martyrdom, and mystically ascend the cross itself with Him. This love is omnipotent, and cannot be had without grace, because it raises the man above himself, and unites the finite creature to the infinite Creator. Man, in fact, mounts continually from humanity to Divinity, when he is animated by this love, which is the sweetest of all the affections, penetrates the soul, dominates the body,

and makes the believer walk on the earth as though wrapt in the Spirit."

Fra Girolamo's keen insight into the human heart showed him the great power which was given him to exercise over his fellow-men, and he felt profoundly the weight of his responsibility. Never did a man use this power more conscientiously for their benefit. He worked with a zeal that permitted him no repose, spending health and strength with a generous prodigality. But what was the use of preaching morality to the people while the clergy set the example of every species of corruption? And what could be expected of the clergy when the rulers of the Church were the scandal of Christendom, and the Pope himself an incarnation of every vice which has stained humanity in a civilised age and country? The generation that owned a Borgia as the head of the Church — what hope was there for it? It must have come to war sooner or later, and he, with that keen far-sightedness of his, must have known it. He knew he would have terrible odds to fight against; but that faith in himself as the instrument of God was strong in him; he believed he would be supported and sustained in the holy cause; but he would neglect no prudent precaution to fortify himself against the enemy. He would avoid any overt act of aggression that would call down the vengeance of the Pope while his party was still weak and unstable. So he worked on resolutely, preaching against the corruptions of manners and the corruption of the clergy, but not attacking any one personally.

Savonarola's love of country, though deep and passionate, was of that wise, noble sort which had for its object, not the temporary triumph of one State or city over another by brute force, but the moral regeneration of all Italy. Anticipating the work of reform, he had obtained from the preceding Pope

permission to break the San Marco connection with Lombardy, as it was a drag on his independence, and he wished to establish himself firmly in Florence, as the centre of his great work. He began his reforms by selling the property of the Monastery, in spite of some serious opposition on the part of the monks. It was a time of scarcity, and Savonarola's fervent sermons on charity had more effect when the fact was known that he had set the example of sacrificing the wealth of his Monastery to the exigencies of the time. "O Religiosi!" he exclaimed, addressing himself to the monks, "will you have your rich tabernacles, your granaries, and your cellars full, while the poor die of hunger and thirst? Is this your vow of poverty? All that you have of superfluous goods, is it not robbed from Christ's poor?"

Lorenzo was dead, and the reins of Government hung loose in the feeble hands of Pietro, his son. All the effects of the Medici misgovernment remained, with the addition of a little more lawlessness. His miserable rule was brought to a termination by his own cowardly vacillating policy. In 1493 Charles VIII of France, invited by the Duke of Milan, marched into Italy, at the head of a great army, to settle some family claims to the throne of Naples, and make arrangements for the defence of Europe against the incursions of the Turks. He was to pay a friendly visit to Florence *en route*; and this intelligence threw the Republic into a terrible state of alarm. The authorities begged Fra Girolamo to preach in the Duomo, to quiet the people, who were threatening to rise, and sack the houses of the nobility, who had so long robbed and oppressed them. The Frate's voice had magic power to still the strong passions of men. He lectured them for their sinfulness and worldliness, and said the King of France was the instrument in the hands of the Almighty to work out the castiga-

tion which was prepared for them. But still, if they would repent and reform, and turn to a righteous life, there might be pardon for them. Above all, there must be forgiveness of enemies, universal peace and union and love.

Meantime the Most Christian King had arrived dangerously near Florence. He was, in fact, at Pisa, having met with little opposition in the course of his march, and having had a sort of triumphal entry into Pisa, which was in a state of rebellion against Florence. The miserable Pietro de' Medici having betaken himself to the King's presence to sue for peace, surrendered fortresses into his hands, and made the most dishonourable conditions that even Charles could demand. The rage of the Florentines was great when this news was conveyed to them. A council was convened, in which the banishment of the Medici was decided upon, and ambassadors chosen to treat on the part of the Republic with the French King.

Among these was Fra Girolamo, because he had the confidence and love of the people, as well as the respect of the King. He addressed Charles as the minister of justice in God's hands, come to purify and reform the Church; and as such he welcomed him. But he warned him, in a threatening and solemn manner, of the duties and responsibilities that such a position entailed. While he spoke in his character of priest Savonarola stood; but when he came to deliver the messages of the Republic, he knelt before the conqueror, and pleaded the cause of Florence with all the burning eloquence of which he was master.

Charles was received courteously, but the Florentines found it difficult to get rid of their unwelcome guest. They found he regarded the city as a conquest, and insisted on the recall of the banished Medici.

The firmness and courage of the brave Capponi saved Florence the humiliating conditions, imposed by Charles. But when all was settled, and the peace signed, the King seemed so enamoured of the *grande ville* that he could not be got away, and the citizens and French soldiers were continually having disagreeable encounters. The city was in a state of suspense — the shops shut up, and no regular Government in office. The Signoria once more called in the aid of the terrible Frate, whom they sent to remonstrate with the King. He was treated with little respect by the retainers, kept waiting in an anteroom, and finally had almost to force his way into the audience chamber. The proud spirit of Savonarola was chafed at the delay of the interview, which, to him, was of vital importance; so when the angry apostle burst into the royal presence, he was all the priest, and no more the diplomatist. Holding the cross on high, he commanded Charles, in the name of the King of kings, to desist from any fell intention he might have against the peace of an unoffending city. The King was overawed, and denied all hostile designs against the Republic.

"Most Christian Prince," said the Frate, "God has appointed you to a great office; but you neglect your duty, waste your time, your soldiers become disordered, and our citizens riotous by this prolonged stay."

The next morning the French army marched out of the *grande ville*, on which they had cast such covetous eyes; and it is said, on good authority, that not only the inferior officers but men of illustrious rank, not excepting the *Cristianissimo* himself, took some valuable souvenirs with them, rifled from the magnificent palace of the Medici, where they were lodged.¹

¹ VILLARI, *History of Savonarola and his times*.

Immediately on the departure of the disagreeable visitors, the Signoria began to think of establishing some regular form of Government, and the great bells of the Palazzo Vecchio rang to summon the people to a Parliament or General Council — that being the mode in which the tyrants of Florence had always deluded the people with an appearance of liberty, and the name of a Republic. The citizens, unaccustomed to exercise their rights truly, were puzzled, and lost in a maze of contradictory arguments on the part of the statesmen who made up the Provisional Government. Endless discussions seemed to be the only result of the Parliament; and this, when the Republic was in danger from the domestic intrigues of the Medici party, from the rebel Pisans and other revolted cities, and, worse than all, the French army returning from Naples. All this time the want and scarcity went on increasing because of the interrupted commerce and neglected agriculture, consequent on the disturbed state of politics and threatened war. Savonarola worked day and night trying to reconcile contending parties, and relieve the wants of the poor.

"Abandon pomp and vanity," he said, in the Duomo. "Sell your superfluous things, and give to the poor citizens. Collect alms in all the churches for the poor of the city and of the country. Spend for them, at least this one year, the money for the studies at the University of Pisa [then shut up]. If it is not enough, we will lay our hands on the vases of the Church. Charity over-rides all law. Above all, make some provision to open the shops, and give employment to the people who are standing idle in the streets."

In this moment of danger, confusion, and suffering, Savonarola was summoned to the Councils of State. All felt that a master mind was needed to guide them in the hour of peril, and he could not



refuse his aid at such a time. But in the Council Chamber he was still the preacher. "Purify your souls, forget private interests, think of the common good, forgive your enemies, and thus, my people, you will commence not only the reform of Florence, but of all Italy, and you will spread your wings throughout the world, and bring reform to all the peoples. — Your reform," he adds, "must commence with spiritual things which stand above material things, and make the rule of life." Then he gave his attention to the subject of the new Government, laying down, as a first and absolute condition, universal amnesty for all political offences. The liberal institutions which were then inaugurated were partly modelled on the Venetian Republic, and partly on some of the old Florentine laws. The sham Parliaments were abolished; there were two Chambers in the Legislature, and the people's rights were secured by the "Grand Council." Fra Girolamo strongly impressed upon the citizens the advisability of never allowing any one man to rule the State, which, he said, was a form of Government suited to Northern peoples, but not to the Florentines. The citizens eagerly adopted all his suggestions. He united to the authority of a zealous minister of religion of spotless life, the subtle genius necessary to Statecraft, and he carried all before him.

Now Savonarola had at last an open field for his reforms, and he was full of hope for the future. The worldly, scornful, vicious Florence did not seem a promising field to "build up the kingdom of God" in; yet in a short time he had the great bulk of the people accepting his teaching and living according to his precepts, which were rigid — perhaps in excess of what was suitable to the disposition of a Southern people. His followers were called *Piagnoni*, which means *weepers*, because they lamented so continually over the

vices of the age. They belonged to all ranks and ages; and the simple, just, honest lives they led made the shameless corruptions of the old Court party stand out in horrible contrast. The Medici were called *Palleschi*, from the family crest, which is five balls. It is needless to say that the *Palleschi* hated the *Piagnoni* as Charles I's Cavaliers hated Cromwell's Puritans—called them whining hypocrites, and threw every obstacle in the way of the reform that they dared do, without making themselves amenable to the law.

The poor people, in their deep distress, suffered terrible exactions from Jewish money-lenders; and to remedy this evil and put an end to usury, Savonarola established the pawn-offices called the *Monte di Pietà*, under the special care of the Government, where the poor were relieved from temporary wants at a very small rate of interest. This was one of his favourite institutions, for which he laboured continually and collected large subscriptions.

Another great work of his was his reclamation of the children. Little boys of a great city are pretty bad in all ages and countries; but, by all accounts, the little boys of Florence were particularly vicious. Thinking of the future generation, and of those who should carry on the work when he was dead, the great reformer turned his attention to the young, as a fertile field of operations.

Many thousands of street Arabs were reclaimed, and put under a regular course of study and discipline. They were formed into regiments, with a captain at the head of each, and were employed in various useful works. The reformation in the manners of their sons had a great effect on the parents, and won many adult converts.

Meantime, the popular Government, chiefly composed of *Piagnoni*, consulted Savonarola in every im-

portant crisis of affairs, foreign and domestic, and he was virtually the ruling spirit of the State, though holding no office therein. Nor did he wish for any title or dignity. Enough for him that they did his will — carried out his ideas; he left to them the empty honours. It was a pure theocracy which he aimed at establishing; the Republic was to have no head but the Supreme Being. Christ was to be its only king. And the wicked little Florentines, who had still to be diverted with religious *fêtes* and processions and military exercises, joyously shouted "*Viva Gesù, il nostro re!*" It seems a little irreverent to our ears; but the pious fathers thought it a blessed sound, and a blessed sight to see all those young scamps so orderly, well behaved, and obedient to the will of their good pastor, whose word was a law to them; whom in after-life they remembered with love and gratitude as the being who had first awakened a soul in them. He loved his young flock; they were his hope and pride; even when he rebuked them it was gently done, always addressing them as his "children," his "beloved ones."

But we cannot suppose that Savonarola ever felt his ideal realised, or that his followers fully carried out his intentions. He told the boys not to make such frequent use of sacred names, thereby leading to irreverence; and we can well imagine that it was not the extravagances of the children alone that offended his taste and wounded his susceptibilities. The great body of his disciples were an ignorant, ill-trained multitude, always given to excess of some sort or other; and some of his most influential followers were injudicious, hot-headed men, who often injured the cause instead of serving it.

Some Northern writers have claimed Savonarola as a Protestant reformer; but there is really no ground for the assumption beyond the fact that he

was a *reformer*. He never attacked the doctrines of the Church, — only its corrupt practices, — and died, beyond all doubt, in the Catholic faith. It is true that he gave more prominence to the Bible as a rule of life than Catholics do, that he studied it profoundly, and always preached from it. It is also true that in none of his sermons, tracts, or prayers do we find the Madonna exalted to the place of Christ. He speaks with reverence of the Virgin, but his prayers were always addressed to the Most High. This was not, however, at that time so strikingly at variance with Catholic doctrine as to attract attention, the exaltation of the Virgin being of comparatively recent times; nor does Savonarola himself seem conscious of any difference in his faith from that of the Church, of which he was to the last a faithful son. It is true that he was accused of heresy at his trial, but that was a common pretext to get rid of an obnoxious person, and impartial Catholic writers have all acquitted him of the charge.

We cannot, therefore, honestly claim Savonarola as a Protestant, though we should be proud to enrol him among our martyrs if he had been such. But we honour his memory with as profound reverence, admiration, and pity, as a noble Christian life, which was one long struggle on the side of virtue against vice, can inspire.

The political disturbances and threats of war had left the Tuscan territories uncultivated for two years: 1495. and so, in 1495, there came a great famine. The cruel laws obliged the starving workmen to return to the place of their birth without furnishing them with the means of so doing. Thousands of labourers thus driven away with their families turned their feeble steps towards Florence for succour, led thither by the hope that the Frate's piety inspired. Florence had at that moment abundance of distress inside her

own walls to be relieved; and the citizens had the first claim, for the mediæval man had little fellow-feeling for those outside *La Patria*, — *i. e.*, his own city; all others were foreigners, almost always enemies. So when the starving peasants presented themselves at the gates, the Magnificent Signoria were divided between prudence and charity. But, fortunately for the strangers, there was one citizen whose large-hearted humanity was bounded by no geographical line. The Frate threw the full weight of his authority into the scales of charity, and the helpless foreigners were admitted — a haggard, sickly band, already half-spent with want. All that Savonarola and his friends could do was insufficient to supply necessities to all, and many perished from disease brought on from hardship and exposure. The Frate made almost superhuman efforts to succour those that remained. The toil and anguish of spirit he endured almost broke down his health. There is something grand in the simplicity of his address to his flock on this occasion: "I desire much that provision be made for these poor people. Do you wish to erect a beautiful temple, inhabited by the Deity? Congregate the poor, supply their wants, be pitiful to them Citizens, I say, call an auction, and sell the precious things of the Church. I will be the first to put the crosses and chalices of my Monastery under the hammer."

III.

Florence was growing peaceful, orderly, and religious under the wholesome rule of Savonarola; but still, among the dregs of the population there was enough ruffianism to cause serious disturbance when put in motion by the Medici party, who were bitterly opposed to him, because he was the champion of Flo-

rentine liberty. These were always working secretly for his destruction; and as the best means of effecting it, insinuations were sent in to the Holy See against his orthodoxy, and hints were given that he had some unparalleled ambitious project in view. The Pope and the mass of the degenerate clergy hated him because he preached against the corruptions of the Church. The crowned heads generally, and Ludovic, of Milan, specially, hated him because he preached against oppression and cruel exactions and violent outrages. All these, working with the Medici party in Florence, set about undermining his influence with the people by circulating calumnies about him.

At last the time had come for the conspirators to make a move. Fra Girolamo was summoned to Rome by the Pope in a most affectionate letter, in which the Holy Father expressed his belief in the special gift of his beloved son to reveal the will of the Almighty, and said he wished to consult him on Church matters. Fra Girolamo was an astute man, and saw the snare; he excused himself on the ground of pressing duties in Florence and delicate health; both of which excuses were quite true in themselves, though not the real cause of his holding back. The Pope wrote again, and then Savonarola explained himself more frankly. His life was beset by enemies who had more than once attempted to destroy it, and he dared not trust himself beyond the walls of Florence. At this time Savonarola, worn out by his exertions during the famine, was really ill, and had to leave the preaching in the Duomo to his friend, Fra Domenico. The most dangerous enemies of the Frate were the monks of St. Francis, because they worked with such cunning; and one especially, whom he had overcome in controversy, nourished a deadly animosity towards him. These stirred up the Pope against

him till there came a bull prohibiting his preaching. He was still in infirm health, and oppressed by domestic as well as public troubles. His family were in pecuniary distress, and had just lost a brother. Savonarola's family affection never became weakened by time or separation. In his long letter, comforting his mother for her recent loss, he felt it right to give her a warning that his own death was not far distant. "I would wish to see your faith such, that, like the holy matrons of old, you could see your sons martyred before your eyes. Mother dearest, it is not because I do not wish to comfort you I say this, but because, if it should happen that I must die, you may be prepared."

The Florentine Government felt insulted by the prohibition of Fra Girolamo to preach, and all well-wishers of peace felt that the good work of reform would be seriously impeded if he remained inactive during the Carnival. Remonstrances were addressed to the Holy See, and the result was that a secret message was sent to the Frate from Alexander VI, offering him a cardinal's hat on condition that he changed his tone about the Church. He refused indignantly, and after that he felt that it must be war to the death. This fact will account for the melancholy forewarning in his letter to his mother, above quoted. The Signoria, however, had, for the present, their own way, and the prohibition was removed; so that he was once more the leading spirit in Florence, and was enabled to have the Carnival celebrated according to his wishes. Before condemning the too monastic spirit of Savonarola's rule, it would be well to read contemporary Florentine writers, and hear how the Carnival was wont to be celebrated in that city, with what brutal excesses, what obscene orgies, what murderous riots, after which the reader will be able to appreciate at its just value the wisdom of the

man who held thus in the hollow of his hand the fierce passions of such a people.

Instead, then, of masquerading and riotous festivities, the Carnival was to be celebrated by a more earnest devotion to religious duties, and was to be wound up by an extraordinary spectacle in the Piazza della Signoria. The youthful army which Savonarola had caused to be organised were sent in detachments through the city, collecting materials for a bonfire of vanities on the last day of the Carnival — that is, Shrove Tuesday. These consisted of masks and masquerading dresses, and extravagantly gay attire, paint pots, false hair, &c.; cards, dice-boxes, and everything appertaining to the gaming-table; pictures and books of an impure and immoral tendency — all forming a heterogeneous mass of enormous proportions, underneath which was laid brushwood and other combustibles.

The boys were dressed for a religious festival in white stoles, each carrying a small red cross; and, says the historian, it was a lovely sight to see the youthful soldiers of Christ marching in a great body to the Duomo to receive the Holy Communion from the hands of Fra Girolamo, chanting in their sweet young voices his beautiful *Hymn to Christ*:

Viva, viva in nostro core
Cristo, re, duce e signore.

In the afternoon almost the whole city added itself to the procession of the children, all sober, orderly, serious, each man and woman carrying the red cross, chanting psalms and sacred songs, dominated by a profound religious enthusiasm. Arrived at the Piazza, the *Pyramid of Vanities* was fired; and while it was being consumed, the people sang a song especially composed for the occasion. The ceremony was closed with the usual *Hymn to Christ*. The boys,

instead of levying black-mail on the passers-by, as they were wont to do, for the expenses of their riotous feasts, collected large sums for the charity of the *Buoni uomini di San Martino*.

Unhappily there perished in this *auto-da-fè* a book of Boccaccio's, the *Decamerone*, and some say, Petrarch's sonnets. We say unhappily, though, not being the only copy, the world sustained no loss; but the fact has been used against the memory of Savonarola, we think unjustly. Firstly, because it is not fair to hold a leader responsible for every folly and excess his followers may be guilty of. No great reformer ever sees his ideal carried into perfection. He has not the making of his instruments; he must work with what come to his hand, and they often misconceive his meaning and exceed his wishes.

But we do not care to defend Savonarola from this unreasonable charge. We are by no means sure that he would have saved Boccaccio's work if he had been consulted. It is just possible that he would have tossed it into the flames with his own scholarly hands. It is true that he was a man of vast learning, and loved books with an ardor second only to his love for the souls of men, perishing, as he believed, through their love of pleasure. Duty, self-denial, sacrifice was what they needed to be taught. Such writers as Boccaccio, no one will deny, were calculated to encourage rather than counteract the fatal vices of the age, against which he was waging a war literally of life and death. As a religious and social reformer of the 15th century, he had rough work to do, which left him, we may imagine, little time for nice, discerning criticism on the light literature of the day. But that he was actuated by pure Vandalism no reasonable, just-minded person will believe. In the main, he had good substantial reasons for what he did; and if he erred on the side of severity,

as the English Puritans did, it was a natural error, the circumstances considered.¹

It seems a curious contradiction that a man who brought to all social questions and to the government of Church and State such a clear, astute practical intellect, should have been so dominated by the imagination as to lend a superstitious faith to the fancies of an over-wrought brain, excited by prolonged fasts and vigils, and to take them as veritable revelations from above. But so it was. Savonarola had had certain previsions of coming evils to his country, and foretold them, and the evils had come, which confirmed him in his faith more strongly, and made him believe himself a true prophet. Believing it firmly as he did, it was not strange that he made others believe it — even the Florentines, whose keen intellect, high culture, and sceptical nature made them seem unlikely subjects for conversion.

Florence in those days, indeed, seemed transformed from what it had been, and Savonarola from the pulpit addressed his flock in a tone of congratulation as he enumerated the evil customs abolished and described the honest, regular life now led by the citizens when compared with the past. His labours seemed at last to be rewarded.

But even then, while he thrilled with happy emotion, a fearful anxiety was wearing out his heart. He had disobeyed the Pope's repeated commands, and was in tacit rebellion against him. The prejudices of ages still held him back from throwing down the gauntlet to the Head of the Church; but he felt each

¹ " For a mind like that of Savonarola imbued with religious sentiment Florentine Art acted like sacred music, and bore witness to the omnipotence of genius inspired by faith. The paintings of Angelico appeared to have brought down angels from Heaven to dwell in the cloisters of San Marco, and he felt as if his soul had been transported to the realms of the blessed. " — VILLARI, *Life of Savonarola*.

day drawing him nearer and nearer to an open rupture. His destiny was dragging him on — how could he resist it? In one of his sermons preached at this time, he declared, with passionate earnestness, he was ready to die for the faith — nay, he desired it. Among the presentiments which haunted him from time to time was a forewarning of his fate. In his *Hymn to the Cross*, he says:

Jesus! would my heart were burning
 With more fervent love for Thee!
 Would my eyes were ever turning
 To Thy Cross of Agony!

Would that, on that Cross suspended,
 I the martyr-pangs might win,
 Where the Lord, the heaven-descended,
 Sinless, suffered for my sin!

In another poem, called *Jesus to the Soul*, the same idea is perceptible. It breathes a spirit of the purest Christianity to which no religionist, of whatever persuasion, could take exception.

Fair soul! created in the primal hour,
 Once pure and grand,
 And for whose sake I left My throne and power
 At God's right hand!
 By this sad heart, pierced through because I love thee,
 Let love and mercy to contrition move thee!

Cast off the sins, thy holy beauty veiling,
 Spirit divine!
 Vain against thee the hosts of hell assailing —
 My strength is thine!
 Drink from My heart the wine of life immortal,
 And love will lead thee back to heaven's portal.

Quench in My light the flame of low desire;
 Crush doubt and fear;
 Even to My glory may each soul aspire
 If victor here.
 Hie now from earth, with earthly vanity,
 And live for evermore in heaven with Me.

I, for thy sake, was pained many sorrows,
And bore the Cross;
Yet heeded not the galling of the arrows,
The shame and loss;
So faint not thou, whate'er the burden be,
Bear with it bravely, even to Calvary.

Still shall My Spirit urge, if thou delayest,
My hand sustain;
My blood wash out thy errors if thou strayest; —
Plead I in vain?
An hour is coming when the judgment loometh;
Repent, fair soul, ere yet that hour cometh! ¹

Savonarola's oft-repeated prophecy that Florence should be scourged was amply fulfilled. A fearful pestilence had followed on the heels of famine, which devastated the poorer parts of the city, and sent the wealthy citizens in a stampede to their villas in the country. Savonarola and his fraternity were invited in every direction by the *Piagnoni*, who put large houses at their disposition; but the prior and the elder monks refused to quit Florence, where they were just then so much needed, contenting themselves with sending the schoolboys and novices to a place of safety till the plague began to abate.

The great object of the conspirators now was to get the Frate out of Florence, where he was always protected by the *Piagnoni*, and make away with him, either by assassination by the road, or judicial murder in Rome. But to Rome the Frate would not go. The fear of the German invasion had made the Signoria remove the prohibition to preach, because they needed the powerful voice to keep the people quiet; but when the danger was passed, they began to feel uncomfortable, as the Pope's ire was still high against the preacher, and the Florentines did not wish to cut loose from the Holy See. Nevertheless, they

¹ Translation by Lady Wilde.



were shocked by the scandals of the Borgia family, which just then reached a culminating point in the treacherous murder of the Pope's eldest son, the Duke of Candia, by his brother Cæsar. Alexander VI, strange to say, had strong paternal affection. The grief into which this deed threw him seemed to have struck him with a transitory remorse for his own crimes, and he called a council to consider a reform of the Church government. Savonarola, although under censure at the time, seized the occasion to write him a letter, which he hoped would touch his awakening conscience. It was the letter of a minister of religion calling a sinner to repentance, thinly veiled by the respectful forms which etiquette prescribed in addressing a prince and the Head of the Church. The Pope was not offended; but afterwards, when he had resumed his wicked way again, he said "that insolent Frate had dared to insult his paternal grief."

Savonarola felt his time was short; there was no longer any hope from the Vatican, so he spoke out plainly — no longer in veiled language, but in a voice of thunder. He had told the Church long ago, and again and again, she was a shameless, dishonoured thing — the abomination of all good men. *Now* he declared it was lawful to disobey a wicked Pope, whose election had been illegal and simoniacal — nay, it was *not lawful* to obey him. Florence was electrified at these discourses. She was not prepared to go all the lengths with him, for it would have been strongly against her interests to break with Rome. She was then threatened with an interdict for allowing the heretical, rebellious Frate to mount the pulpit of the Duomo. So he was once more constrained to retire to his monastery. These intervals of silence Savonarola spent in his study, writing and dictating letters to his secretary — for he had an overwhelming correspondence — in which were embraced many crowned

heads. One important letter penned at this time was addressed to the King of France, begging of him to call a council and depose Alexander VI. Letters to the same effect were addressed to the other Sovereigns of Europe: but this one to Charles, which was more peremptory, fell into the hands of the enemy, and was transmitted to Rome.

His enemies, unhappily, were not all outside Florence. There were the *Arrabbiati* (enraged party), consisting of the Medici and other members of the nobility, who hated him because he had given liberal institutions to the Republic, and was the people's friend. There were the *Compagnacci* (evil companions), an armed band of 500 men of the worst characters in the city, headed by a stupid ruffian of high birth, called Dolfo Spini, who hated him because he had put a stop to their lawless pleasure. There was the clerical party, who hated him because he wanted to reform the Church. All these worked together to undermine him with the people, and partially succeeded — that is, with the lowest and most ignorant part of the populace.

An unfortunate circumstance just then occurred which helped to damage the reputation of the Frate. A conspiracy to bring back the Medici was discovered only when Piero was just at the gate. The great gong sounded, and the citizens rushed to arms in time to save Florence. The chief conspirator was found to be the head of the State, the Gonfaloniere, Bernardo del Nero, an old man of seventy-five years. He was executed with the others, and it was thought hard of the Frate not to have interposed his influence to save him, because the old man was not a traitor, as the word was then understood, he having always been a Medician, and only accepted the popular Government as an inevitable thing. Had he been a personal enemy, it is probable Fra Girolamo would have pleaded for

him, for his nature was generous; but he was an enemy of the State, an enemy of the cause for which he himself expected to die at no distant day, and he did not think it right to interfere.

His life was at this time encompassed by intrigues at home and abroad. It took all the powers of his subtle intellect to escape the snares that were laid for him. Still he held on for awhile after the Bull of Excommunication (1497), and went through his duties, carrying on a vigorous correspondence, though he must have known his days were counted. The bearer of the Bull was afraid to enter Florence, and sent it from Siena, so great was still the popularity of the Frate. But a surer means of destroying that popularity was being prepared. A Franciscan monk had repeatedly challenged a monk of San Marco, Savonarola's most devoted friend, to a trial by fire. The prior forbid Fra Domenico to take any notice of his adversary. But the Franciscan persisted in denouncing Savonarola as a son of perdition, a deceiver of the people, &c., and the good Domenico was at last roused to defy him in the name of his superior. He accepted the challenge; he was ready to walk through fire to prove the doctrines and character of his beloved padre true and pure. 1497.

At this juncture the Government changed hands, and a party very hostile to the Frate chiefly composed of *Arrabbiati*, were in office. They eagerly seized on this opportunity of bringing him into contempt with the populace. They arranged all the preliminaries for the ordeal in the Piazza della Signoria, in front of the Public Palace (Palazzo Vecchio), and published placards inviting any one who chose to enter the lists on either side. There were many frati of San Marco and citizens also, ready to do so — at least they thought so in the moment of enthusiasm, though probably they would have failed at the last. Fra Domenico's faith,

however, in God and his pastor was of that simple child-like sort which knows no faltering. At any moment he would have walked into the flames at the bidding of his chief. But perhaps, after all, it is easier to play the part of a follower, whose duty is simply to believe and obey, than that of the leader, oppressed by the weight of an awful responsibility.

There is evidence enough to show that Savonarola had little faith in the ordeal by fire. Yet if he positively declined it, ruin awaited him and his party, for the people were wildly excited in expectation of a miracle. He shut himself up in his cell to meditate and pray. He hoped for some accident that would prevent the horrible ordeal, and deliver him from the hands of his enemies. The day came, and solemn preparations had been made for it by the Signoria. In the great Piazza there had been erected a platform forty feet long and six feet wide. This passage was enclosed between piles of faggots and all sorts of combustible stuff. The two champions were supposed to walk from one end of the platform to the other, side by side, when the pile was in a blaze — that is to say, the champion of truth would so walk, the false one, of course, would be consumed in the transit. Under the colonnade of the Palazzo degli Uffizi, there is a broad, open *loggia*, with steps leading up to it. This space was divided in two parts by a partition, one of which was devoted to the Dominicans, and the other to the Franciscans — the former had erected a little altar in the corner. An immense crowd filled the vast Piazza, while many clung to railings, posts, and roof-tops. The grey-frocked Franciscans were early on the ground with Bonsi, the challenger. After some delay, the Dominicans came in sight, robed in white with black mantles, Fra Domenico walking in front in a red-coloured cope, Savonarola following, bearing the Host. The procession

approached the loggia, chaunting: " Let God arise, and let His enemies be scattered."

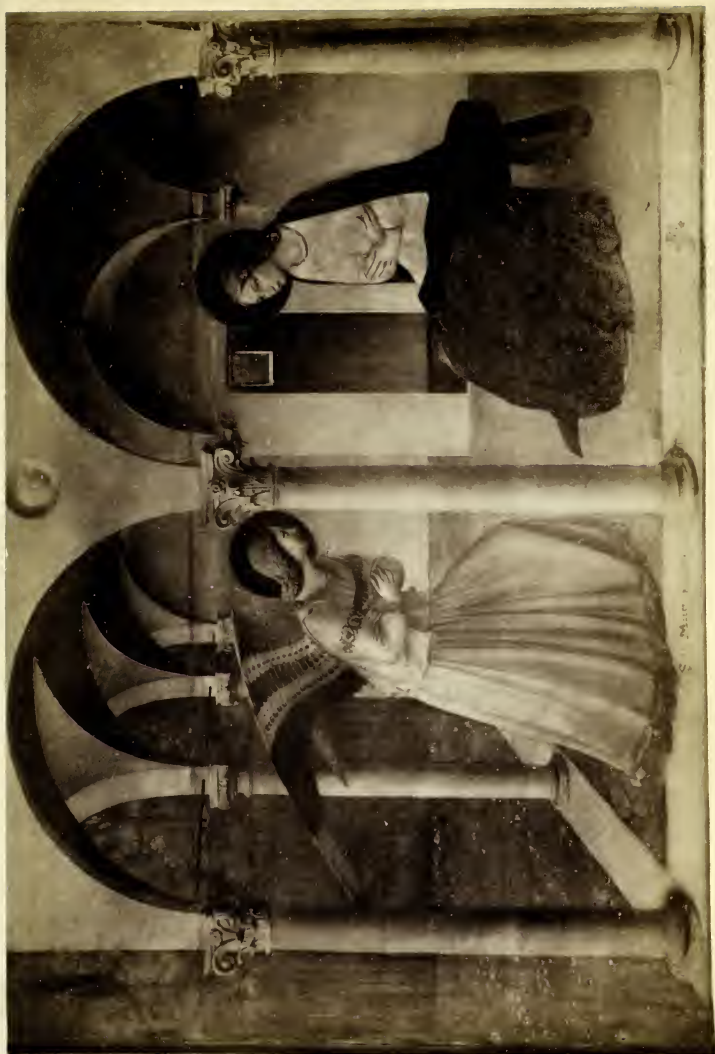
The apostle, though worn with fasts and vigils and mental turmoil, walked with a firm step and resolute front. Who can guess the state of his mind at that moment? Perhaps his brother's faith had communicated itself to him, and he hoped that God would perform a miracle—not for His servant's sake, but for the sake of the truth. More probably his soul was torn with doubts of his mission, and remorse for having, by his two lofty assumptions, imperilled the good cause he had served so long. Be this as it may, he showed no outward sign of weakness. As he walked with his usual calm dignity up the steps of the loggia, and deposited the sacred elements on the altar, something between a cry and a sob was heard in different parts of the Piazza. It came from the full hearts of the *Piagnoni*, who had come armed to defend their prophet should the necessity arise.

The Dominicans prostrated themselves round the altar in prayer. Fra Domenico never wavered, but the Franciscans took exception to his red cope, which seemed to them to have something Satanic in it. Who could tell what brimstone magic might not be concealed within its folds? The good brother offered to take off the objectionable mantle. Would he further oblige them by changing *all* his clothes with a Franciscan? No, that he never would. He was Dominican, and nothing could induce him to don the robes of any other order; but, not to make difficulties, he was willing to change his clothes with a brother Dominican. This was done in the Palazzo Vecchio, and then he was marched back between two Franciscans, lest Savonarola should touch his garb and enchant him again. All things were now ready; and Domenico, grasping his cross, prepared to enter the flames. The Franciscan again objected; he must not take the

cross lest it should be burned. After some discussion, Savonarola yielded the point; but instead of the cross, he placed the Host in the hands of the champion, and said he would not allow him to enter the fire without such protection. The Franciscans, who were only seeking a pretext to hold back, never having intended anything but to expose Savonarola to doubt and ridicule, were shocked at the idea of carrying the Host into the fire, and got up a theological discussion, which lasted so long that the multitude grew savage. Heavy rain began to fall, and in the midst of the confusion and uproar, the Evil Companions, followed by the mob — ferocious at being disappointed in the spectacle of a miracle or a burning — made an onslaught on the loggia to put an end to the dispute with the sword. The *Piagnoni* were prepared for violence, and defended the loggia, till the Signoria sent an armed body to escort the Frate home. His partisans also accompanied him to the portal of his convent, for they mistrusted the Government officials. Salviati, a noble of influence among the *Piagnoni*, said, when bidding him farewell: "Padre, I am, and always shall be, yours; command me still." When a great man is bowed down by falsehood, treachery, and ingratitude, there are still some crumbs of consolation in words like those of Salviati.

On this day Charles VIII died suddenly, and, with him, Savonarola's only hope of safety. For, though he had more than once met the French King in opposition, he was known to have a great esteem for him, and he never would have allowed him to be sacrificed to clerical malice and revenge.

After the events in the Piazza, Savonarola knew his doom was sealed. Next day he preached a sermon — his last — in his own church, in which he solemnly called God to witness that he had preached nothing but the truth as it was given him from above, and



declared he was ready to die for the cause to which his life had been consecrated. He then retired to his cell to prepare for the worst.

Meantime the agitation in the city went on increasing. The surging crowds of *Piagnoni*, *Arrabbiati*, and *Compagnacci* encountered each other in the streets, and came to blows. The Duomo was crowded with people hoping for the arrival of Fra Girolamo; but, instead of him, his enemy, Fra Mariano, came in, and was about to ascend the pulpit to attack Savonarola, as his custom was, but he was pushed back by the indignant congregation. A demoniacal rage seized the frate, and he rushed to the door and shouted to the mob. "To San Marco! To San Marco!" — a cry which was quickly caught up by the Evil Companions and all the ruffianism that followed in their wake. The congregation heard these cries, and threw themselves precipitately out of the cathedral, hastening by the shortest routes to the defence of the monastery. Salviati was already there with the aged Valori and other tried friends. With a few hastily-collected arms, the *Piagnoni* were hurrying from all parts to throw themselves into the monastery. Neither were the frati inactive. There were among them noblemen and gentlemen who had not forgotten the use of arms, and wielded them bravely on that fatal evening.

While these preparations were going on in the monastery, the mob, hounded on by the *Compagnacci*, moved forward, gathering fresh strength and rage, and killing any respectable citizens they met who were suspected of coming from San Marco. Valori was one of those murdered in the streets. The assault on the convent was aided by scaling-ladders procured for the purpose by the Franciscan Brothers.¹ After a

¹ Padre Marchese and professor Aquarone, as well as the old historians, mention this fact.

long and obstinate resistance, the doors of the church and monastery were fired. In the midst of the burning, some of the mob burst in through a subterranean passage which led to the cellars, and they went through the building, devastating all before them. In the church a fearful scene was going on. Savonarola stood on the altar, surrounded by his friends and brothers, during the defence. They were now suffocating with smoke, and had to break the windows to let in air. One of the defenders was just then carried in dying, and, receiving the Sacrament, breathed his last there on the altar. Savonarola then took the Host in his hands, and ordered them all to follow him to the library, and cease the vain contest.

Some monks followed him, but many disobeyed his commands, and continued to defend the church desperately. The besieged behaved gallantly, but were finally overcome by the overwhelming numbers from without, whose infernal delight in sacrilege and murder found vent in the most horrible blasphemies. Night began to close in, but the rioting did not cease till eight o'clock, when a body of military, sent by the Government, put a stop to further outrage.

The officer in command, Andrea de Medici, asked for the prior, saying the Signoria required his presence, but guaranteed his safe return to San Marco. Savonarola's friends proposed taking him away over the garden wall in some way, and he hesitated to accept the offer; but one of the monks, Malatesta, said: "Ought not the good shepherd lay down his life for the sheep?" This speech seemed to move Savonarola deeply. After a few minutes' reflection, he said he had decided to surrender himself. He then called all the brethren round him in the Greek Library, where he returned the keys of the monastery to the assembled community which had elected him. "Here I must part with you at last, my dearest sons,"

he said; "I leave you with tears, for I must now deliver myself into the hands of my enemies. Nevertheless, I go with joy of heart, with a ready will, bearing everything for the love of Jesus Christ."

He confessed to Fra Domenico, the champion of the fire ordeal, and took the Sacrament. Then he blessed and embraced them all, and thanked Malatesta for having recalled him to a sense of his duty. At the door of the library, he met the Commissioners with a calm dignity, saying: "I expected this, but not so soon." His frati followed him along the corridor, clinging to his mantle, kissing his hands, and imploring to be allowed to follow him, even to the stake. There was then resident in San Marco a young Fra Benedetto — a poet and miniature painter. He had been one of the gayest and wildest youths in Florence; but one day a noble lady persuaded him to accompany her to the Duomo to hear the good Padre Girolamo, and he in courtesy could not refuse, though he laughed to scorn the preacher and his disciples. He was struck by the sermon, returned again and again, and finally sought a private interview with the prior, begging to be received into the community of San Marco. Twice he was refused admittance as not yet properly prepared, but at last he was accepted, after a prolonged trial in the midst of his former associates. "The old Adam," however, was not quite dead in this young man, for he fought like a lion on that terrible evening, and only laid down his arms when resistance was hopeless. The love he bore to his superior in life, and his fidelity to his memory after his death, is a beautiful and touching episode in the story of San Marco.

As Savonarola was about to pass the portal for the last time, and the crowd outside were howling like wild beasts hungry for their prey, Benedetto rushed wildly into the portico, and, clasping the prior's hand, implored him on his knees to take him

with him. It was almost too much for the poor Frate. With trembling hands he raised the youth, pressed him to his breast in silence, and then pushed him away. The next moment he had passed out into the Piazza with the Commissioners, and the furious cries of the mob at the sight of him told Benedetto what he might expect. He fell against a pillar, sobbing convulsively.

Two other monks were taken from San Marco, Savonarola's two dearest friends and fellow-workers — Fra Domenico and Fra Silvestro. Fra Domenico, we already know; he was the champion of the ordeal, and few words will suffice to describe his less admirable brother. Silvestro was a nervous, imaginative, dreamy man, given to somnambulism, and to seeing visions while in that state, which fact made Savonarola give more weight to his opinions than his intellect warranted. He was sincerely religious and deeply attached to his superior. He was not a brave man, and during the fight he had hidden himself in a cellar, where, some say, he was unearthed by Malatesta, who seems to have had a taste for making martyrs, though not disposed to be one himself. It is only fair to say that some trustworthy writers assert that Silvestro, repenting of his want of spirit, went and surrendered himself to the Government.

The transit of the unhappy Frate from one end of the city to the other amid the brutal insults of the mob — who cursed him, spat upon him, kicked and beat him, in spite of the drawn swords of Andrea de Medici and the other Commissioners, who endeavoured to protect him as well as they could — must have been a martyrdom greater than actual death. It was for those ingrates he had lived, laboured, and was about to die!

He was put under examination that night, half dead as he was, and the following day he was before

the tribunal for seven or eight hours. He declared he had never preached anything but the will of God as he believed it to be revealed to him; that he had never deceived the people, and denied categorically all the charges over and over again. At last his patience gave way, and he exclaimed: "You tempt God with your unreasonable questionings!" The magistrates elected to try him were all enemies, and one of them was Dolfo Spini, the leader of the Evil Companions. On the first day of the examination, before Savonarola was put to the torture, one of the judges withdrew from the trial, saying he would not have his children's name stained with the blood of a just man. The examination continued for eleven days, and was enough to turn the brain of an ordinary man, without the addition of bodily torture; but that was not spared. He was of an extremely delicate, sensitive fibre, and his tormentors said they never saw any one on whom it had such a sudden and extraordinary effect. His biographer, Perugino, says: "They put him to the torture repeatedly the same day, and, being very weak and of an extremely sensitive frame, he was quite broken; he lost the light of reason, and spoke things contrary to sense." Nardi, another contemporary writer, says, that while under torture, he confessed being a false prophet and a deceiver of the people; but the moment he was released, he retracted the confession, and declared he had always preached the truth; if he said otherwise, it was because the torments rendered him delirious.

"'Twere long to tell and sad to trace" the whole trial of Savonarola. It is painful beyond description to read it, not only for the physical sufferings endured by him, though they were terrible — an eye-witness reported that he was suspended on the rope fourteen times in the course of one day! — but it is doubly painful to see a great man whom we love and

admire become less than himself — to read the humiliating confessions, retractions, contradictions. Yet even at his lowest Savonarola was still great. During all those long days of harrowing examination, part of the time delirious, he never compromised a friend, never betrayed a political secret. He knew how to baffle his judges by ambiguous replies, and when they could wring nothing out of him, they applied the rope. The reader of the trial will know this by the wild, incoherent replies, even without looking at the marginal notes, "*Torture — Tortured*," which occur frequently. It was only on the subject of *prophecy* that he confessed himself false — *that* concerned himself alone, and would not hurt the consciences nor the liberties of others.

Another hideous blot on the name of the Florentine Government remains to be revealed. The true confession of Savonarola was not such as would serve their purpose with the public in Florence, or with the world in general. Therefore they employed the notary Ser Ceccone, to write a false one, in which the prisoner confesses himself to be actuated by the basest motives. This document was circulated diligently among the people, and read to a commission of San Marco monks in order to disgust them with their superior. It was also read to the two fellow-prisoners of Savonarola, and had a certain effect on the weak-minded Silvestro, but none upon Domenico. Thirty years after, the real confession was discovered, and the false one removed from the archives.

IV.

With Savonarola in their hands, the Florentines thought it a good opportunity of making their peace with the Holy See. It was Easter time, and they

wanted to confess and be absolved. Alexander VI graciously accepted their repentance, and sent a general absolution to Florence, which included homicides. But there was a condition attached to the Pope's pardon — the surrender of the arch-offender Fra Girolamo into his hands. The Signoria demurred, because the prisoner might reveal too much of Florentine affairs, and they begged His Holiness to let them deal with the heretic as they might think fit. On this subject there was much difference of opinion. One of the judges suggested a strange punishment for a "heretic, traitor, deceiver," etc. — that he should be shut up in a safe fortress, comfortably lodged, with a good library at his command, and writing materials, in which case he would compose "books of rarest quality for the honour of religion and the benefit of posterity." But another judge replied with the fatal words: "Dead men make no war."

While reposing his disjointed bones during the twenty days that the Papal Commissioners were waited for, Savonarola read a good deal, and finished his tract *Rules for a Christian Life*. His voice and presence had not lost their magic power, for he converted his jailor, a man of bad life, by reading passages from his little work. He also wrote *An Exposition of Psalm LI*, an outpouring of the sorrows of his soul in a torrent of fervid, poetic language, which it is impossible to read without a thrill of deep sympathy. We here transcribe a few lines.

"Be pitiful to me, O Lord, not according to the mercy of man, which is small, but according to Thine, which is great, immense, incomprehensible — which exceeds the immensity of our sins. Have mercy upon me, O Lord, not according to Thy small mercy, for Thy mercy is small when it relieves and liberates men from bodily miseries; but it is great when Thou pardonest sin, and raisest men above the level of the

earth. So, Lord, have mercy on me according to Thy great mercy. . . . St. Peter denied, and with oath disowned, Thee. Thou didst look upon him, and he wept, and Thou didst pardon him, and confirm him prince of the Apostles. . . . The thief on the cross with one sole word was saved. Paul, called in the heat of his persecution, was filled with the Holy Spirit. These are among Thy mercies, O Lord. Then according to the multitude of Thy mercies, cancel my iniquity, and cleanse my heart, so that it may be purged from every impurity. Let it become as a white sheet, on which the finger of the Lord may write the law of His charity, in which no sin may ever more dwell. I come to Thee, O Lord, not as the Pharisee, but as the publican, because I know my iniquity. I come to Thee, O Lord, weighted with sin, and I wear myself day and night with the moaning of my heart.¹ ”

While perusing these lines, the reader almost sees the interior of the condemned cell, with the wasted form of the prisoner seated on the pallet, almost feels the hot tears that fall on the paper, blurring the delicate, minute penmanship — almost hears the low sob of anguish that breaks from his pallid lips.

But while we record the suffering of the master, it would be unjust not to mention those of his faithful disciples :

They who had loved him, followed him, fought for him;
Lived in his mild and magnificent eye;
Caught his clear accents; learned his great language;
Made him their pattern to live or to die.

Fra Silvestro, as we have seen, was a man of small courage, weak and nervous; the more his merit for what he endured before he cried out, like Savonarola,

¹ This work has been translated into German, but not into English, as far as we know. Long extracts from it are to be found in professor Aquarone's admirable and most impartial *Life of Savonarola*.

"I will confess." And even in that confession he bore witness to his master's virtues, as if involuntarily. This document was also falsified by the secretary. Fra Domenico was allowed to write his own confessions. The reason for this does not appear, but it prevented the possibility of their being garbled; and so this heroic monk's honour has remained unassailed, because untarnishable. He was tortured to a greater excess than Savonarola, being of a stronger fibre, and better able to support the pains. He alone of all the three was put upon the rack. It was to make him confess the private vices of his superior, to acknowledge that he was a hypocrite. But the man who would have walked into the fire to prove him a true prophet was not likely to invent calumnies of his hero, even in that awful hour. With a matchless constancy, he persisted in bearing testimony to the spotless purity of the friar's life, as well as his innocence of all the charges brought against him. There is hardly such another example of friendship on record as this of the San Marco friar, and the man must have been rare indeed who inspired it. Savonarola, who had borne false witness against himself, could not have reproached him if he had yielded to the instincts of exhausted nature and "confessed."—"Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friend." And it would have been ten times easier to go to the scaffold, than day after day to face those cruel, remorseless judges, with the cord and rack ever at their side. But Fra Domenico presented the sublime spectacle of suffering — not to save the life of his friend, but his honour, which he himself had surrendered under similar inflictions. He was firm to the end; and at the last, when the Papal Commissioners had almost extinguished the little life the Signoria had left in this strong man, the brave soul still spoke in its simple truth: "I

have told all I remember as though I had now to die, the which may easily come to pass if you torture me, because I am all broken. I have my two arms destroyed, particularly the left, which has been twice broken. Thus I pray you be clement, and believe the truth of my simple writing." The judges pressed him more fiercely, and he replied: "I know nothing more, as I was always occupied with trying to live rightly, and thinking of Jesus Christ, King of Florence. So, then this second cord, if not believing me, you choose to give it; you shall find nothing more in me, for there is nothing, and you will put me in peril of my life." It was done; and when he was taken down the pen was put once more in his hand, and he traced in trembling characters the last words of his confession: "The will of God be done! I never could have, nor ever did have, the slightest suspicion that the Father Girolamo deceived, or was in the smallest point untruthful. More, he appeared to me most upright, and I have always judged him a rare man. And having for him great reverence, I hoped, by his means, to have grace from God to do some good for the souls of men; and holding him to be a man of God, I obeyed him as a subject, with sincere solicitude. Sometimes I have said to the frati, and sometimes to some layman, that if I should know in Father Girolamo the least error or deception, I should unveil and publish it; and I certainly should, for I never could bear any duplicity."

Calmly, nay, joyfully, the good fathers prepared for death after the civil sentence was known. The Florentines differed a good deal on the subject, but the majority were for death; and, indeed, if they wished to be reconciled to the Holy See, they had no choice but to vote for death. The wide world was all too small to hold two such spirits as Girolamo Savonarola and Roderigo Borgia.

One more bitter trial awaited the unhappy Prior of San Marco before the welcome news of death came to release him from the intolerable burden of life. Twenty days after the condemnation by the civil law, the Papal Commissioners arrived, and he was dragged from his cell to be re-examined by those cruel instruments of clerical tyranny. Utterly broken in mind and body, he could only repeat what he had always said in his sober senses — that he had worked honestly and consistently for the honour of God and the good of the people; that he had never uttered a prophecy which he did not feel impelled to by a presentiment which he believed to be a warning from God. What he had confessed under torture was false, and he had retracted it, as he would confess and retract again under similar circumstances, for he knew himself to be "weak and inconstant under torments."

That day the Commissioners could get no good of him, and the following day the examination was renewed. They found the prisoner unusually firm and clear in his answers. He was questioned about not observing the excommunication, and he acknowledged he was wrong, and asked pardon. He was asked if he had always taught the truth, and at this point the Cardinal Romilino ordered him to be stripped, and put to the torture. At the sight of the fatal cord, the prisoner's aspect changed terribly. With almost convulsive agitation, he threw himself on his knees, raised his eyes to heaven, and said: "God, Thou hast called me! I confess I have denied Christ — that I have said a lie! Florentine gentlemen, be my witnesses that I have denied for fear of the torments. If I must suffer, I will suffer for the truth! That which I preached, I had it from God. God, Thou givest me this penance because I have denied Thee, and I merit it!" By this time they had torn off his gown, and he, showing his left arm hanging dead, continued thus:

"I have denied God for fear of these torments!" When drawn up by the rope, he cried: "Jesus, aid me! This time Thou hast called me!" But, alas! it was not to be; he was not to take even this thread of comfort to the grave with him. When the quivering nerves could bear no more, he said: "Tear me no more; I will tell the truth, certain, certain!" — "Why have you denied it just now?" they asked. "Because I am a madman," he replied. He confessed that he wished to be absolute ruler of Florence, to extend his powers over all the land, to call a general council to depose the Pope, etc. When asked if he wanted to make himself Pope, he answered No; any worthless, debauched priest might be Pope; but to occupy the position he aspired to, required a man of excellent virtues. "Marvel not," he said, wearied with their questions, "marvel not if I have told you few things, for my purposes were few and great."

He was condemned as a heretic, schismatic, and persecutor of the Church. The other two were also condemned, though Silvestro was not found guilty of these offences, the Papal Commissioners saying a miserable frate more or less did not matter.

Again the prisoner took up his pen, and gave vent to his feelings in the *Exposition* of another psalm, *In te, Domine, speravi*, in which we see that he had found peace and comfort. It breaks off in the middle of a period, the Commissioners having deprived him of writing materials. The last night of Savonarola's life a "comforter" was let stay all night with him. He begged him for a bit of paper, and wrote a beautiful prayer for the Communion Service. He then asked, as a great favour, to be let see his brothers, and he was conducted to them.

It was a moment of intense emotion for all. They sank at his feet for his blessing as of yore, when he was at the pinnacle of his glory. He gently rebuked

Domenico for having requested to be burned alive, and said more severely to Silvestro: "I hear you wish to defend yourself to the people when on the scaffold. I request that you abandon that idea, and follow rather the example of Christ, who not even on the Cross spoke of His innocence." There was no word of reproach for the false evidence he gave against him at the trial. Savonarola, knowing his own weakness, pitied and pardoned the miserable Silvestro, and comforted him and his companion with hope for the future, and tender words, calling them his *carissimi figliuoli*.

When the Padre returned to his cell he felt very much exhausted, and asked for a drink of water. He refused the offer of supper, saying he had need to strengthen his soul, not his body. He asked his confessor to let him rest his head on his knee, for he had no bed. Fra Niccolini willingly supported the weary head in that last earthly sleep, which he said was calm and untroubled as an infant's, a happy smile playing over the worn features, as if he had heavenly visions. As the good father watched him sleeping peacefully through the last few hours of his stormy life, he probably thought that it would be a long time before he would have such another penitent to shrive.

It was the eve of Ascension Day, May 23rd 1498. 1498. Early in the morning the prisoners were conducted to the chapel to hear Mass. Savonarola was allowed to take the Communion in his own hands without an officiating priest. He repeated aloud the prayer he had composed the night before. At the foot of the stairs the prisoners were denuded of their mantles and white tunics, making them appear in the Piazza with nothing on but shirt and drawers. One would have thought that nothing could now move Savonarola. He had drunk the bitter cup to the dregs in his examination, and after that everything would have seemed

light. But while a thread of life remained his sensitive soul quivered under every stab. His pale face flushed at this fresh indignity, then tears rose to his eyes as he caught up the Dominican dress in his arms, and exclaimed: "O holy habit, how much I desired thee! By the grace of God thou wast conceded to me, and I have preserved thee unsullied even till now. And now I would not leave thee, but thou art taken from me!"

In the Piazza opposite the Palazzo Vecchio, where the Trial by Fire had taken place, a scaffold had been erected in the form of a cross, with three iron chains depending from it. Round this the funeral pyre of brushwood and faggots was piled up as on the day of the ordeal. The condemned ones were to be hanged, and then the bodies burned and the ashes thrown into the Arno, lest the *Piagnoni* should preserve some relics of them. Under the Loggia dei Lanzi sat the Monsignori, the Gonfaloniere of Florence and officers of State. The Piazza was crowded to excess with the vilest of the population, burning with the unreasoning hatred that ignorant, vicious people feel towards those superior to them, and whom they rejoice to see humiliated. The *Piagnoni* were there, too, their hearts wrung with a double anguish. They had read the falsified confession in which their prophet had declared himself a deceiver, a hypocrite, an impostor! The grief of losing a beloved pastor by a cruel, unjust death was as nothing to the agony of soul caused by a doubt in him. And they could not help doubting, for his name was to the document, in his own small, beautiful characters. But the faith of loyal souls is difficult to destroy; and many declared it to be a trick — as indeed it was — and others that he had lost his reason from excess of torture.

The prisoners had been re-dressed in order that the bishop might strip them publicly of their priestly



garb. In doing so he said to Savonarola: "I thus separate you from the Church Militant and Triumphant." To which the martyr replied with mild dignity: "Monsignore, from the Church Militant you may; but not from the Church Triumphant; it does not appertain to your office." The Commissioners read their condemnation, and told them at the same time that the Pope sent them a plenary indulgence to save them from Purgatory. Then the Gonfaloniere read the civil condemnation, and the three prisoners, accompanied each by a confessor, passed along the platform that ran from the Loggia to the foot of the scaffold. Fra Domenico, who seemed not only resigned but joyous, would have chanted a *Te Deum*, but his confessor begged him not, as it might rouse the people and cause bloodshed. The *Piagnoni* were powerless; they would but die in vain if it came to a fight. The first that ascended the scaffold was Silvestro, pale, with eyes full of tears; then Domenico, bold, resolute, cheerful. Lastly the ill-starred prophet, with a calm, unmoved expression. The *Piagnoni* stood in breathless agitation, expecting him to declare his innocence; but we know from what he had said to Silvestro that he disapproved of such a course. Nevertheless, he put away the hand of the executioner, and turned his eyes on the crowd in silence. A voice cried: "O Savonarola, now is the time for a miracle; delay no longer!"

Not a word he spoke. That long look of silent reproach was all the farewell he took of that ungrateful Florence, to whose glory and happiness he had sacrificed his life.

It is not just, however, to condemn all the Florentines. The *Piagnoni* mourned their apostle with the deepest grief. For two hundred years after his death, every returning 23rd of May was held sacred to his memory. He had no grave, alas! on which to lay

flowers and wreaths, but they carried them to a little temporary altar, erected on the spot where he died, and to the church, from the pulpit of which he had so often addressed his people. They preserved everything belonging to him that had not perished in the sack of the convent, with the most religious zeal, in spite of the bitter persecutions with which they were persued.

CHAPTER IV.

AFTER SAVONAROLA.

I.

The *Piagnoni* were the Puritans of Italy, and Savonarola was their Cromwell. The devotion to duty, the stern heroism, the severity — almost amounting to cruelty — towards the enemy, the spirit of self-sacrifice, the constancy which the *Piagnoni* displayed, frequently recall the English Puritans to the mind of the reader, with, of course, certain modifications — the result of race. For example: — No Italian, of whatever creed, could have done the work the iconoclasts did in the Civil War. His love of art is in-born, and he could not perpetrate an act of Vandalism. The most ascetic rigid *Piagnone* never would have dreamed of despoiling his church of its ornaments. An æsthetic form of worship is a necessity to the Latin race, and the modern evangelising party will make a serious mistake if they do not accommodate their church a little to the sentiments and requirements of the Southern nature.

The comparison which we have ventured to make between the people will, perhaps, apply equally to the leaders of the two great movements in England and Italy. Cromwell's force of character, political saga-

city, genius for ruling, we find also in Savonarola, with the natural difference between a churchman and a soldier. But the Italian, in addition, had the refinement of high culture — poetry, eloquence, and a winning sweetness of character, which tempered the severity of his principles, and won the love of every one who was admitted to his intimacy. His friends describe him as plain in face, but with a dignified deportment; an eye brilliant, penetrating, mild, and benevolent; a smile rarely seen, indeed, but with a sad, sweet expression, which touched and interested the beholder. His hair was thick and dark; his form slender; "his members all so delicate that his hand seemed transparent." His mode of living from boyhood was of the very simplest, his fasts frequent; his bed was a straw mattress. He was a man of orderly habits, and extremely neat and clean.

Savonarola's personal fascination is attested by the wonderful influence he exercised, not on the masses only, but on men of the highest gifts, of uncommon cultivation and strong character, — the men of the Renaissance, whose sympathies were all pagan. Lorenzo with all his adamantine selfishness of heart felt it to a certain degree, and we have many other remarkable instances of his power over men of great intellect. Michel Angelo was a constant attendant of his church when he was still very young, and his teaching left an indelible impression upon him. The greatest artists of the day, Sandro Botticelli, Bartolommeo della Porta, and two of the Robbia, were amongst his ardent converts. Of poets and storytellers not a few abandoned their art, or changed its form under his potent influence. It penetrated into the corrupt Court, and Poliziano, the poet and scholar, who unless he has been much slandered, was one of the wickedest of the Medici's distinguished company, expressed contrition for his sins and begged



to be interred in the Church of San Marco, robed in the Dominican habit.

But Pico, prince of Mirandola, was his most brilliant conquest. There were giants in those days, and a man should have been very lofty indeed whose intellectual stature excited much attention. But Pico, taken as a whole, considering the quality and variety of his mental gifts, his exquisite manners, his physical strength and beauty, seems to have been one of the most glorious and perfect of created beings. Of his erudition it is only necessary to mention that at eighteen he was acquainted with twenty-two languages and their respective literatures. When twenty-six years old, he went to Rome and published a challenge offering to dispute nine hundred propositions on different subjects, and no one ventured to accept the challenge; but a charge of heresy was brought against him, and he returned to the more congenial atmosphere of Florence, and became Lorenzo's friend till death. He lived amongst the brilliant pagan assemblage of poets, philosophers, scholars; but he was not one of them. He was an avowed christian and a devoted admirer of the Prior of San Marco. It was Pico who arranged the meeting between Savonarola and Lorenzo, and he was in the ante-room during the momentous interview. He had studied theology for years, and had long cherished the intention of entering the Monastery of San Marco. It is impossible to say what he might not have accomplished had he lived. But alas, at the early age of thirty-five death carried off this splendid specimen of the race, "so noble in reason, so infinite in faculty, in action so like an angel, in apprehension so like a god."

According to his desire, he was robed in the white Dominican habit and laid in his beloved Church of San Marco.

San Marco reached its culminating glory under Sa-

vonarola's government, and after his death it declined rapidly. We must now record the darkest chapter in the story of that renowned monastery. Threatened with destruction, as the brothers were, after the tragedy just recorded; their faith in their prior shaken by the false confession which they were assured were his exact words, they were induced to write a letter to Alexander VI, expressing contrition, and reviling their late abbot as the cause of all their failings. We will not believe that *all* the community signed this shameful document. The men who had fought on the night of the assault, let us hope they were exceptions. But there were signatures enough to represent the fraternity; and if it was not for the sake of the few loyal spirits that still remained, we would feel little concern for the fate of those recreant monks who licked the dust at Alexander's feet before Savonarola's smoking ashes were quenched in the Arno. The leading spirit in this movement was Malatesta, who, the reader will remember, was the immediate cause of Savonarola's decision to surrender himself, when he said: "Ought not the good pastor give his life for the sheep?" — which, though it might possibly be the duty of the pastor, was not at all a becoming suggestion on the part of the sheep. In the same spirit he hunted up the unfortunate Silvestro when the officers inquired for him; and when once he had the excuse of Savonarola's false confession to go upon, he denounced him with a ferocity almost incredible, considering that he had professed himself his most devoted friend, and said he was ready to enter the flames to prove his doctrine true. Padre Marchese¹ would have us believe this man a sincere fanatic, always in extremes; but as his fanaticism was always on the winning side, we must call

¹ *Storia di San Marco.*



him a *traitor*. The document which he drew up and induced his brothers to sign is unexampled for the vileness of its fawning adulation to Alexander, which would have been degrading from any man to any other, be his merits what they might, but which, addressed to the Borgia, we have no language to characterise; its abject meanness is only equalled by its gross vituperation. And yet, in trying to defend themselves, the monks are forced to bear high testimony to Savonarola's virtues.

"His profound knowledge, his uncontaminated life, his simulated devotion, the conversion of many sinners, the abolition of usury, bad houses, and other immoralities; the peace and concord that reigned in the city, the union of souls to God — all these things effected by his teaching, won our implicit faith. But at last this infernal dragon," &c., &c.

The Pope's absolution notwithstanding, the community of San Marco were persecuted almost to the death. Some fled into banishment; others, not daring to issue out of their convent, would have perished of hunger but for the charity of the *Piagnoni* citizens, who conveyed them provisions over the garden wall at night. The *Piagnona* — so the great bell of San Marco was vulgarly called — was sentenced to fifty years exile, and to be whipped out of the city by the hangman. Amongst those who fled was Fra Benedetto, his mind darkened by a transitory doubt in the truth of the great teacher at whose feet he had sat so long. But the cloud soon passed, and he returned to his first faith with more fervour than ever. We have before us some sweet lines in which the young poet laments the inconstancy of the fraternity and the public in general, and the cruel way they defame the memory of the *buon pastore*.

Brave, loyal, warm-hearted soul! Let us honour his memory, — for though he had not the renown of

dying on the scaffold, he, too, was a martyr, and suffered a lifelong persecution for his defence of *il buon pastore*, and his intemperate attacks on the enemies of his hero.¹

II.

When the storm was over, the banished frati returned to San Marco; they had back their great bell, and they put their monastery in repair. But their reputation? alas! they could not put that in repair. Even the monkish chroniclers have not attempted to patch it up, and there remains the ugly rent to the present day. San Marco was suppressed in 1866 by the Italian Government, and turned into a museum. The reader who has had the patience to follow the history of its founders in the foregoing pages, would like, perhaps, to have a glance at the interior of the monastery as it now stands.

The door of the monastery opens into the large Piazza of San Marco. On entering the portico we find a man who takes possession of our umbrellas, and we pass directly into the cool shade of the cloisters, with their lofty colonnades and frescoed walls, deliciously quiet, peaceful, and refreshing after the noise and glare of the piazza. The large square court in the midst, with no roof but the blue vault of heaven, admits light, air, and sunshine enough to make it

¹ We transcribe the lines alluded to above:

Lo viddi tal ch'al santo contradisse,
 E qual in vita già lo difendeva;
 D'entrar nel fuoco ancor più volte disse,
 Morto ch'el vidde, e qual cosa diceva?
 Ei ci ingannava, ed è stato ribaldo,
 E come lupo il buon pastor mordeva!
 Quasi nessun rimase in fede saldo,
 Ed io ancor alquanto vacillai,
 Ma poco durò il freddo e venne il caldo.





always a cheerful and healthful promenade. We look round and see a number of doors on all sides leading to the interior of the building. The four walls are covered from end to end with frescoes, some of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and some of later date. The first wall has the story of the founder, St. Antonino, depicted upon it, and at the end is a fine Crucifixion, with St. Dominick embracing the Cross. The face of Christ has an expression of divine calm which seems to triumph over mortal pain — an expression which Fra Angelico only knew how to give. Over the first door St. Peter the Martyr stands with his finger to his lips to denote that silence is the rule of the Order. This saint has a finely-cut head, but a stern, menacing expression of countenance, and a cold, relentless eye, which repels at the first glance, even if one did not know the story of his absurd pretensions to martyrdom. He was stabbed through the heart one evening passing through a wood, by the friends of those whom he had given to the Inquisition — a light punishment for the ills he inflicted on others.

Over the other doors there are appropriate frescoes by Fra Angelico. One is St. Dominick; another, Christ rising out of the Sepulchre; a third represents Our Saviour disguised as a Pilgrim, seeking hospitality, welcomed by two Dominican monks. A passage opens into the small refectory, with one grand fresco: The Cenaculum, by Ghirlandajo; another door from the cloisters leads to the large refectory, also adorned by one immense fresco: The Brethren at table receiving food from the Angels.¹ On the other side of the cloisters we enter the spacious chapter-hall, where we find ourselves in front of Fra Ange-

¹ Called "La Provvidenza": authorship disputed between Bartolommeo and Sogliani.

lico's most perfect and most characteristic work. In it he surpasses himself in the exquisite delicacy of touch and brilliancy of colouring, which he owed to his long practice as illuminator, and which makes his frescoes look like enlarged miniature paintings; and in it he allowed unfettered scope to his imagination. Instead of representing a place of execution historically correct, with Roman soldiers, cavalry, and infantry, fierce, half-naked executioners, scoffers, blasphemers, and all the ruffianism which usually attend such scenes in real life, *Il Beato*, following the dictates of his profoundly religious nature, painted a Calvary all his own, peopled by saints, taken promiscuously from all ages and countries. It offended Macaulay's taste to see a cowed head at the foot of the Cross; the historic English mind could not bear such a gross anachronism — such a violation of literal truth. But to the mystic painter it was not a literal, but an allegorical representation, meant to edify, suggest, and instruct. "Never have I seen," says Padre Marchese, "so sublime a conception worked out with such slender means; others may surpass him in design and form, but no one can put in the breast of another man such a thrill of pious awe and grief."

It is a vast picture of 32 hands in width, and little less in height. The figures on the cross are nude, and here Angelico's weak point is visible, particularly in the forms of the two thieves, that of Christ being more natural and expressive. But the face of the dying Lord, turned slightly towards the penitent, to whom He has just spoken the words of comfort, is beautiful, with a beauty not of earth. The penitent, looking upon it, has caught some of its holy resignation. The other malefactor's face is hideous and distorted, his mouth open uttering blasphemies. Behind the figures on the cross there is visible a glowing, blood-red cloud, such as is common in Italian sunsets; for





the day is far spent, the Sacrifice is almost accomplished.

By the Cross, her station keeping,
Stood the mournful mother weeping.

But as the agony is drawing to a close, her strength gives way, and she sinks forward, caught in the arms of St. John and some female saints. Mary Magdalen starts forward to aid her, and behind her stands John the Baptist pointing to the Saviour, whose coming he had foretold. St. Mark, kneeling, holds the Evangels in his hand. Then comes St. Lawrence in a brilliant robe and the gridiron on which he was roasted; behind him St. Cosmus and St. Damian, patrons of the Medici. On the other side of the Cross are many saints; first of all St. Dominick in a blue habit kneels with outspread hand and upturned eyes; St. Augustine with a pen and a book gazes at the Cross as if seeking from thence his inspiration; St. Albert robed as a bishop, and St. Jerome kneeling with his cardinal's hat lying beside him; St. Benedict and St. Romuald are standing; and in front of them kneels St. Francis in a gray habit with the Stigmata on hands and feet; St. Bernard with his book is kneeling, and St. Gualbert, the interesting founder of Vallombrosa Monastery, is standing; St. Peter Martyr, who always appears with a bleeding head and dagger or knife upon his shoulder, with which he was despatched, has a repellant aspect even on his knees; behind him stands the last figure of the group, St. Thomas Aquinas, a spiritual and intellectual face. There are in all twenty-two figures; and the whole forms a harmonious and lovely composition.

We now ascend the broad staircase worthy of a palace, and enter the library, which is the glory of San Marco. It is lined from end to end with the old parchment volumes of the Renaissance times. Down

the centre of the hall, between the two rows of Doric columns, there runs a table with a double file of brass-bound volumes of the Gospels and choral books, beautifully illuminated, many of them by Fra Angelico's brother. This exquisite art was brought to a pitch of perfection by the brothers of Mugello. Beyond this apartment there is another, called the Greek Library, where Savonarola took his last farewell of his flock.

As we arrive at the top of the stairs leading to the cells, the eye is arrested by a fresco on the opposite wall of the corridor representing the Annunciation. Mary is seated under the portico of her house, outside of which there is a garden hedge and gate. She wears a gown of pale red, and a blue mantle folded over her knees. Her blond hair falls loosely on her neck, her delicate hands are folded on her bosom, and her head bent in an attitude of reverence and submission. The angel, a radiant figure, just in the act of folding his wings, hardly seems to touch the earth on which he has alighted. The attitudes, the expression, the colouring — all proclaim this graceful picture to be from the hand of the *Beato*. Everywhere fresh beauties meet the eye, but too numerous for mention. Fra Angelico painted frescoes in forty cells, representing the history of our Lord from nativity to death, and also the history of the Virgin. In the cell occupied by Cosmo de Medici he painted a lovely representation of the Adoration of the Magi, in which it would appear that he had taken some hints from the new school and improved his defects, without, however, losing any of his own peculiar charms. The beauty of the infant Jesus and the Madonna was all his own, while the manly forms of the kings and the attendants were worthy of a first-class modern painter, says Marchese. One of the servants is shading his eyes with his hand, and gazing up at the star which



has stopped over the Infant's habitation. This fresco was greatly injured, and has been restored.

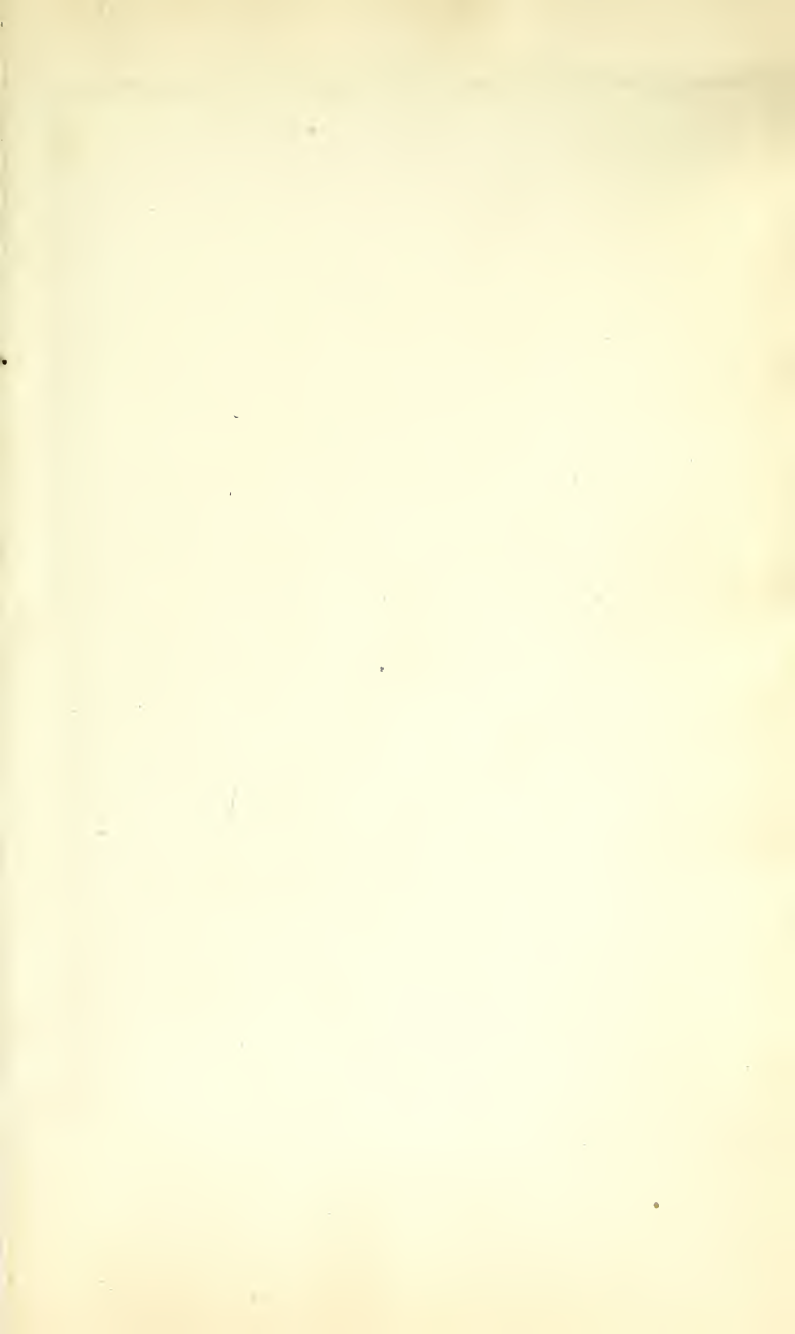
In one of the cells there is a bust and portrait of St. Antonino, and a large glass case containing his archiepiscopal robes. We wander on from cell to cell admiring the works of the *Beato*, till we have a confused blending of delicate rainbow tints before our mind's eye, and Madonnas innumerable — Madonnas in dark blue mantles starred with silver, in sky blue mantles, in white robes, ascending to heaven, seated on a soft pink or golden cloud, or enthroned on high, receiving the crown of glory in the midst of a host of angels.

Arrived at the far end of the corridor, an open door, with two steps up to it, invites us to enter, and we find ourselves in a small, frescoed ante-room. To the right is a bronze bust with an inscription on the pedestal, and opposite the door there is a broad slab of white marble, also surmounted by a bust of the same remarkable head and covered with figures in bass-relief. They represent a crowd of antique Florentines listening attentively to a Dominican monk, who holds in one hand a scroll, while the other is raised in solemn address. We draw near, and read the inscription: — *A Frate Girolamo Savonarola, contemplante cittadino, oratore operoso, forte al patire; molti Italiani, quattro secoli quasi dopo la morte sua, p. MDCCCLXXIII.*

We enter the inner room, also a very small one, which served the Prior of San Marco as a study. It is furnished with memorials of the illustrious dead. In a glass-case fastened to the wall is the hair belt which the ascetic father frequently wore, and other small belongings. By the wall beside the little window is a desk of dark polished wood, modelled on the antique with little drawers and presses in it. Underneath the glass front are open parchment vo-

lumes, yellow with age. The broad margins, especially that of the Bible, are covered so closely with commentaries in a microscopic hand that there is hardly room for a pin's head between the lines. There is still another inner cell, about the size of a dressing-closet, where the great Frate slept. On the wall here there is a copy of an interesting old picture, the original of which is in the Palazzo Corsini, representing the last act in the drama in which he played so conspicuous a part. There is the Palazzo Vecchio lifting its lofty tower to the sky; the Loggia dei Lanzi, where are seated the ecclesiastical judges; there is the crowded Piazza; the funeral pyre, from which the flames begin to mount; while above, on the high platform at the foot of the gallows are the half-naked, shadowy forms of the three doomed ones. We turn from this sad picture, and re-enter the study. It was here he read, and wrote, and thought, and schemed. In the lonely hours of the night, when the frati were slumbering peacefully, his busy brain was at work on the great problems of life. This little room seems charged with memories of him. While gazing at the writing in the margin of the Bible, we raise our eyes, and behold! there is the Frate looking down from the wall with that penetrating, yet mild glance, which seems as if he knew human nature, and yet pitied it. It is the portrait painted by Fra Bartolommeo.

We take it for granted that the traveller has been touched by the Story of San Marco; what person with a soul would not feel it? M.^r Howells, who regards Savonarola as a "strange and frenzied apostle of the Impossible," confesses to standing before San Marco with a swelling heart. The traveller then, who has entered into the spirit of the place, will do as he did: he will seek out with devout reverence every spot about Florence which has been associated with the great man. He will visit the Villa Careggi





and look with interest at the portraits of the old Florentines on the walls; he will meditate by the splendid state bed where the holiest man in Florence stood by the most distinguished sinner of his age and exhorted him to repentance, when the *gran peccatore*, still a slave to his master passion, turned his face to the wall. He will visit the *Sala del Cinquecento* where the reformer held his parliaments, now presided over by his marble statue; he will climb the lofty tower to the top flight to stand for a minute within the narrow cell where the prisoner passed his last twenty days on earth; he will look with a new interest on the Piazza where he was martyred, and think with a vague regret that his ashes are not enshrined in some sacred spot.

Savonarola was not more misunderstood by his own and following generations than is generally the fate of original men. What the great man is most to be pitied for is his *isolation of soul*. Even his followers who love, who adore him, cannot sympathize with all his moods, because they stand on a lower range of thought and feeling.

The solemn peaks but to the stars are known;
But to the stars and the cold lunar beams.
Alone the sun arises, and alone
Spring the great streams.

How can we then profess to read his heart, we who see him dimly through the mist of ages now, and could have but imperfectly comprehended him had we been privileged to sit at his feet in San Marco?

This great soul failed, it is said, because his aims were too lofty, his standard too high. But was it really because his standard was too high or his age too low instead? St. Paul's standard was too high for the bulk of his countrymen; and those who abstained from persecuting him, doubtless, called him an impracticable person, a visionary, an enthusiast.

But their indifference or antagonism did not make him relax his lofty code of morality, or abate one jot of his Master's claims. When a great man is sent into the world on a special mission he cannot temporize; he must deliver his message if the peace of the whole earth is to be disturbed by it. And Savonarola was inspired by the passion which the author of *Ecce Homo* calls the Enthusiasm of Humanity, but what St. Paul would have called the Holy Spirit, called by whatever name it means one and the same thing; and he only fulfilled his destiny in trying to burst the bonds which fettered the souls of men and lead them into a purer and higher atmosphere. Where he failed the fault was theirs; in as much as he succeeded the glory was his. We will say then, as Carlyle does of Knox: "Let us praise the hero-priest who wears out in toil and calumny and contradiction a noble life to make God's Kingdom of this earth. The earth will not become too godlike."

THE END.

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